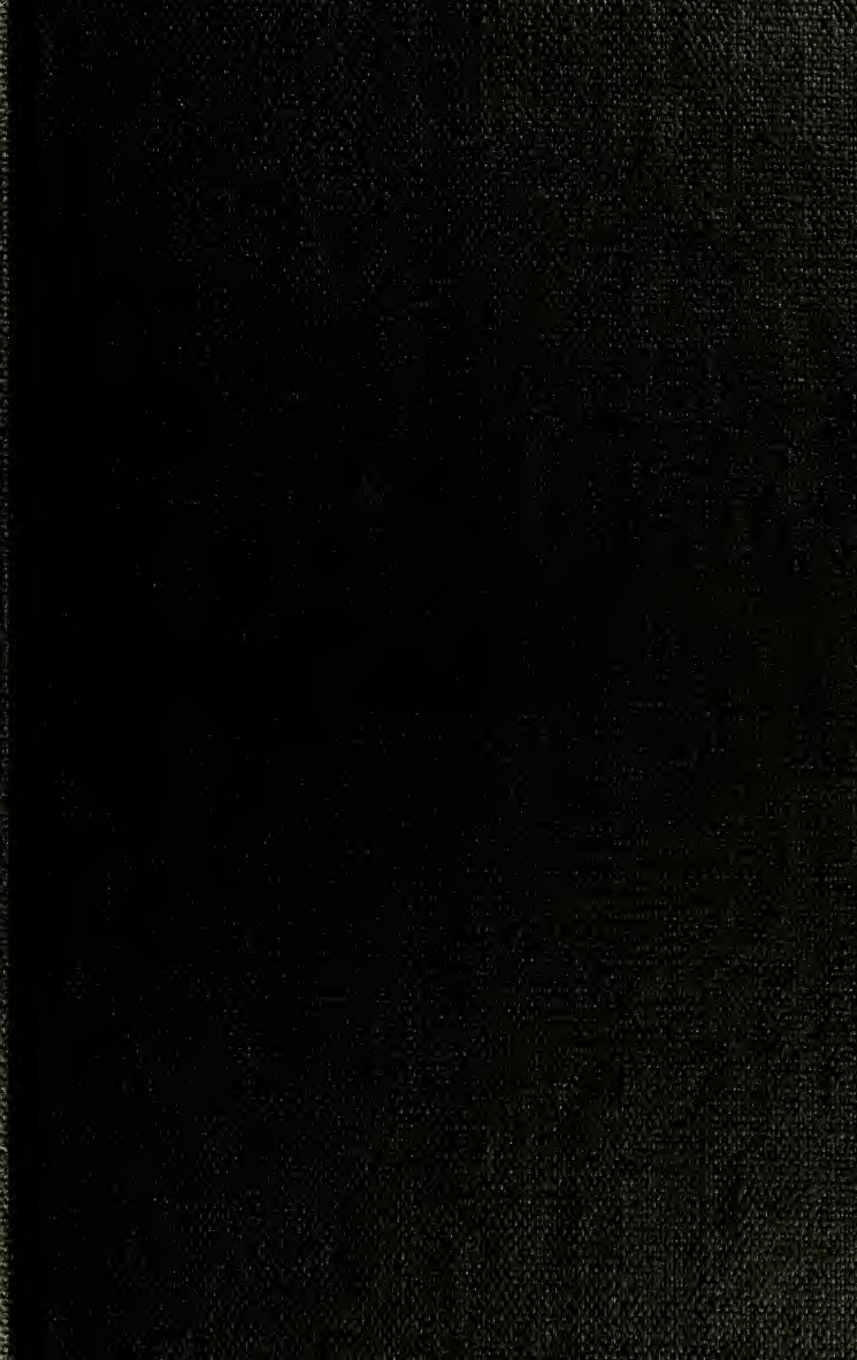


"The Invasion of the City of Washington"

A Disagreeable Study in and of Military Unpreparedness

To be prepared for war is one of the most effectual means of preserving peace.—*George Washington, President of the United States, to the first Congress of the United States, January 8, 1790.*

By

JOHN M. STAHL,

Author of
The Real Farmer; Just Stories; The Story of Ed; The Battle of Plattsburg, Etc.

THE VAN TRUMP COMPANY
Publishers

E358
.W38S8
Copy 2

Copyright, 1918.
By John M. Stahl

JUN 28 1918

©CLA501132

To

The Daughters of 1812,

The Society of the War of 1812,

and

All that Love Liberty and Democracy,

Honor the Brave,

and

Glory in the Star Spangled Banner.

1.

THIS BOOK HAS BEEN WRITTEN BECAUSE

very many indeed of the American people believe that the soldiers of the United States opposed to the British forces that accomplished "the Invasion of the City of Washington" (as the event was most often called at the time) were cowardly, and fled without firing scarcely a shot. This belief is founded on a vile libel of the dead as well as of the living—some severely wounded—that we cannot fasten on the British soldiers, for those that wrote of the fighting paid just tribute to our forces; but which had its origin in a weak and "whitewashing" report of the subservient congressional committee that, while it did not directly accuse our soldiers, gave the cue and an excuse to the group of American writers that persistently libelled our soldiers of the War of 1812. This lie about our brave soldiers has been allowed to live too long.

Why many of the Americans that wrote of our "Second War of Independence" chose to belittle the achievements of our soldiers in that war and actually

to libel them, taking from both the living and the dead that fair fame which it is most cruel to lose and most despicable to take, has been explained in the author's "The Battle of Plattsburg," and need not be repeated here.

The truth about "The Invasion of the City of Washington" is only justice to the brave, patriotic soldiers that fought well at Bladensburg to defend the national capital. To recall the truth about those soldiers is never less nor more than a patriotic duty, and one of compelling timeliness when war and peril should make every heart burn and pulsate with pride in and love of country and the insistent desire to do the utmost to make secure for ourselves and others that liberty and government for which our brave countrymen before us twice fought a War of Independence.

But the welfare of the living is beyond and above even the good repute of the dead. The second reason, and the better reason, for the writing of this book is that "The Invasion of the City of Washington" furnishes the best example in the history of the United States of the inevitable results of the unmitigated foolishness and positive national crime of military unpreparedness.

Sad to say, it is only slightly the best among a humiliating number of such examples.

All good and true Americans abhor war, while

believing that there are times when not to fight, and fight well, is dishonorable and criminal. We believe in honorable peace; as did a certain Virginia gentleman, who had gained wisdom in both peace and war, and who said in a speech to Congress, January 8, 1790:

"To be prepared for war is one of the most effectual means of preserving peace."

George Washington knew that the nation not prepared effectually to defend itself will invite attack as long as human nature is not fundamentally changed; until men are made into saints. He knew that untrained patriots, not lacking the least in bravery and fighting remarkably well for men put to strange work about which they know nothing and in which they have not had any experience, cannot be depended on, cannot reasonably be expected to be victorious over trained, seasoned fighters. He knew that the untrained soldiers cannot protect their country from attack by putting wholesome doubt or fear into the trained soldiers of another country. Washington had had experience with soldiers equipped with a full supply of patriotism, but, as soldiers, untrained and inexperienced; and February 10, 1776, he wrote frankly and confidentially to his friend, Joseph Reed:

"The party sent to Bunker Hill had some good and some bad men engaged in it. One or two courts have been held on the conduct of part of them. To be plain, these people are not to be depended upon if

exposed; and any man will fight well if he thinks himself in no danger. I do not apply this only to these people. I suppose it to be the case with all raw and undisciplined troops."

This is somewhat, but far from altogether, unjust to the troops. Three years later, even one year later, Washington would have written differently. He would have written differently in February, 1776, had he not been discouraged, disheartened. In this same letter to Reed he wrote:

"I know that much is expected of me; I know, that without men, without arms, without ammunition, without anything fit for the accommodation of a soldier, little is to be done. * * * * So far from my having an army of twenty thousand men well armed, I have been here with less than one-half of that number, including sick, furloughed, and on command, and those neither armed nor clothed, as they should be. In short, my situation has been such, that I have been obliged to use art to conceal it from my own officers."

Truly Washington could speak as one having knowledge when he spoke of military unpreparedness and its consequences. His sad, disheartening experience of it did not end in Massachusetts.

But the American people soon forget the disastrous results of military unpreparedness as they also forgot the words of Washington, who, in that most remarkable—most intimate, solemn and wise—state

paper, his "Farewell Address," said:

"Remembering that timely disbursements to prepare for danger frequently prevent much greater disbursements to repel it."

His countrymen, whom he so solemnly addressed, had **not** remembered, and when war was declared against Great Britain in June, 1812, although we had been moving toward it surely for years, the United States had neither a navy nor a standing army worthy of the name. And during all the period of the War adequate preparations and measures to conduct the War successfully were hindered, and generally prevented, by that same fear of liberal expenditure and of vigorous execution that exists even in this hour of war and peril and by its existence now, though feeble, warns us that it will grow into dangerous strength as soon as the war ends. During all the period of the War of 1812 there were those that opposed—some openly and many more subtly and covertly—the utmost vigor of action to obtain the measures and means to secure that military preparedness that is the best ambassador to negotiate peace. For Stephen A. Douglas voiced a truth when he said in his great address to the Illinois legislature, April 25, 1861:

"When hostile armies are marching under rude and obvious banners against the government of our country, the shortest way to peace is the most stupendous and unanimous preparation for war. The great-

er the unanimity the less blood will be shed. The more prompt and energetic is the movement, and the more important it is in numbers, the shorter will be the struggle."

But the American people had paid little heed indeed to the words of Washington; and some failed to see the truth Douglas so well expressed half a century later; while those that did perceive it were held fast by their own timidity or the timidity and influence of others; and as a result, when the enemy, after more than two years of war, and after more than a year's incursions into and occupancy of the nearby territory, with ample warning approached our national capital, there were yet no adequate means or measures to repel the hostile army.

Major George Peter, one of the most intelligent, efficient and fair minded soldiers this country has ever produced, wrote of the battle of Bladensburg—the unfortunate result of which permitted "The Invasion of the City of Washington:"

"A want of military experience was the ground work of all the errors committed in the military operations of that day * * * The great defect was the want of military experience."

Major Peter was in position to speak knowingly of the battle of Bladensburg. He could say truthfully, as he did in his illuminating account of the battle, "I was the first to meet the enemy, and the last piece of

artillery fired at the battle of Bladensburg was from my battery, after I had received an order to retreat."

It is well to repeat here that the American troops that participated in the battle of Bladensburg were not lacking in bravery. When we consider all the conditions we are surprised, not that they did not do better, but that they did as well as they did. Not they, but the failure of the national administration to take adequate measures for national defense, and the failure of the state authorities as well to do their part, were responsible for the result at Bladensburg, and make it true that—

"The Invasion of the City of Washington" August 24, 1814, is as forcible and convincing an event as could well occur to demonstrate the catastrophe and humiliation that may come to any people as foolish and blind about their defense as a nation as were the American people in the years—and days—previous to August 24, 1814; and as they have been in all too many years since that day of shame and panic.

Even today—a day of dire national peril as well as obtruding national duty—when it is our disgrace, as it has been more than once before, to be unprepared to defend our people, our rights, and the right; and when it may easily be our peril and loss and humiliation as it has been before, thus to be unprepared: there are many that yet doubt the wisdom and downright necessity of military preparedness at all times,

and there are some that actually oppose that universal military training on which adequate national defense must rest as its foundation. There are those that cannot or will not see that which is made plain and always has been made plain as time unfolds events: that to be defenseless invites attack; that the military training of citizens for defense is not an irrevocable commitment of a nation to a large standing army or to "militarism," or a commitment of any kind to anything except the ability and readiness to do our part as a nation to make right and the rights of a free people secure, within our borders and beyond our borders; and that this ability and readiness to wage war successfully is the best guarantee of peace—and for others as well as ourselves when less than war on our part would be disgrace because less than war would be shirking our duty as a nation.

Even now we need to be awakened and as with a blow that stings and hurts, to the inevitable loss and humiliation of a nation that cannot fight—efficiently and fiercely; a loss and humiliation inevitable as long as men are men.

2.

A FOOL'S PARADISE

is a phrase disagreeably uncomplimentary and harsh to apply to a state of mind of one's countrymen, but it must be confessed that we people of this "greatest and most glorious country on the globe" are prone to give lightly and to receive seriously that which is flattery; and there are conditions, mental and material, that not only warrant, but demand plain speaking.

Somewhat more than a century ago the American people were foolish—that is the only word to use—about the national defense. One would say that they were incredibly foolish were it not that certain events, notably "The Invasion of the City of Washington," prove that foolishness; and were it not that this foolishness has persisted, to greater or less degree, to more or less extent to this day! While we are hurrying, with all the confusion and waste of hurry, and all the inefficiency of workmen at a strange task, to put ourselves in position to fight—at this very hour—there are those that boldly proclaim that this waste and con-

fusion—and the infinitely worse results that must come from it—loss of limb and sight and life—are better than to have been prepared! And there is abundant evidence that as soon as the present war is over there will be many indeed to lull and persuade and cajole and push us into the old dangerous, disgraceful condition of inability to defend ourselves or protect others.

There is real need that we be told and reminded of and be warned by the loss and disgrace of "The Invasion of the City of Washington." Also, it is time indeed that the truth about that event and the events leading up to it, be told, fearlessly, that plain justice, and justice only, be done to the brave soldiers and sailors that fought, and fought well—for untrained soldiers fought almost incredibly well—but with the only result to be expected from military unpreparedness and inexperience.

As a people we have been indeed unwise in our indisposition to be prepared for war in times of peace because, for one thing, we have followed false prophets and blind leaders, so sure that they were very wise and so insistent that they were, that they have made all too many of our people to believe in their wisdom; whereas events, which, without malice, but none the less cruelly, strip fools and show them to be what they are, have shown that these soi-disant wise people that have been so sure that the world has grown too good

to wage war and that the nation that does right is secure from attack, are all of them foolish, and well-nigh as hurtful to the people they mislead as if they were selfish and traitorous.

The American people have been unwise about national defense because, for another thing, they have not realized that all other peoples are not as happily circumstanced and as happy as themselves. We have thought—if we thought about it at all—that other peoples were as fortunately situated, as well fed, as prosperous and as good, as ourselves. Having "a place in the sun" and a much larger place than we have needed or could utilize, we have not realized that many, many millions have no adequate place in the sun. Having no need of, and therefore no desire for, more room, we have not realized that many millions have that most urgent call of the stomach not well filled and of the soul that feels hard circumstances bearing down on it cruelly day after day, and therefore have a desire that will not be forever denied for more room that both the material and the spiritual may be fed and ministered unto—a desire so strong, so propulsive, so insistent, that it leads even those weakened and fearful in body and mind by years and years of cruel conditions, to fight and kill; fight and kill with that wild fury that, while it shames the beasts in its excesses, almost glorifies those enslaved fighting for freedom of the body, mind and soul. Being well provided with

the good things of this world, and being safe and secure, we have been too comfortable ourselves to think as with conviction that to many millions there is no meal time that comes at any certain hour; that many millions eat, not when the stomach, accustomed to a schedule, calls for food—or unaccustomed to any schedule, calls for food—but when a little food, say a handful of rice or a piece of unpalatable bread, or a soup of some vegetable of far greater bulk than nutrition, can be had; not thinking, also, that of these many millions often hungry and who have no regular and sure meal time, many indeed are to be found in those "civilized" and "rich" nations of which the few have so very much. Being generally well filled ourselves, we have actually shut our eyes to that which history has hung aloft in the sky to those that having eyes will to see—when the head is well nigh empty and the stomach is altogether empty, it is easy to fill the heart with hate. Not having even those kings that should be put to some useful employment because they are figureheads and as kings are useless, we have not realized that there are kings with kingly ambitions (for that which is in truth kingly is always selfish and crafty); with kingly lack of morality and pity; with kingly contempt of those not kings; with the fierce, fanatical, fearful and selfish kingly belief in the divine right of kings to have millions of common people suffer agony and death, to have nations drink to the dregs the cup of

poverty, suffering and hopelessness, to make these kings more powerful and oppressive—at the least, to keep a throne under them. Having the peace of the full stomach and the head that lies secure on a soft pillow, we have not realized that other peoples must not only keep the door locked always, but must continually stand guard with weapon in hand, and that while the man thus stands guard he often hears his children cry for bread; a condition that, because of the unwisdom of one or the ill temper of another very little fraction of the people, may lead to war, and very often war that spreads to neighbors, relatives and friends. Finally, we have had such a vast, vast, vast new country to occupy and conquer; that by its riches continually called to us, tempted us, tantalized us; that enlarged always and pushed out farther and farther, as if they marked the horizon, its borders of hope and aspiration and opportunity and achievement; so that in the work of forest and mine and field and forge and store we have been so very busy of head and hand that we have not found time to think of war, and the things that bring war. We have found it more agreeable to think of an era of universal peace as if it had really come. Having generally well filled and regularly filled stomachs, sufficient apparel for comfort and often for vanity, and an amplitude of good shelter, it has been easy and comfortable for us to be friendly in thought towards other nations, to exercise those

Christian virtues of forbearance and tolerance and even generosity that make one disposed to be peaceable and therefore easily persuaded that war is sadly out of date and that all that go to war are cruel and criminal.

History repeats itself. The ideas, utterances, and inaction in regard to military preparedness of the American people during the first years of the twentieth century have a disquieting similitude to their ideas, utterances and inaction in regard to the same matter during the first years of the nineteenth century. Before Aug. 24, 1814, we had been at war, actual war, and with the great British Kingdom for our enemy, for more than two years; we had been making, through all of that time, a great show of stupendous preparation for a large and efficient and well equipped army and navy; our statesmen and highest officials had relieved themselves of many lofty utterances, and the lackeys and claquers of the national administration regularly called attention to its godlike diplomatic ability and almost devilish diplomatic astuteness as shown in state papers and public addresses as well as conferences and negotiations. The creation of armies on paper by requisitions on those that had neither men nor munitions, the defenses created in imagination by wordy proclamations and pronouncements, were surpassed only by the inefficiency, confusion and conflict of effort in the departments of the national government.

The nation, somewhat disquieted by failure in the war, was yet reassured by the complacent confidence of the national administration and congress, and the many newspapers that found it more convenient and profitable, and may have believed it more patriotic, to hide the truth than to expose incompetency and danger. One of the results was the burning of the national capitol. A week; yes, a day before the battle of Bladensburg, which allowed the British to "violate the metropolis" of Washington the day following, and compelled the President and other public officials to flee to escape capture, not one person in a hundred among the people of the United States had the least thought that such an event was possible! The people of this country now are no more certain in their belief that no catastrophe and humiliation can come to us now, and they have no less reason for such certainty of belief, than the people of this country were certain in their belief in 1812, or even 1813, or even later, that there was not the least possibility of that which did occur—"The Invasion of the City of Washington." In 1814 our foe dwelt three thousand miles away. And he had only sailing vessels.

3.

MILITARY UNPREPAREDNESS

and it alone, for with it went military inexperience and incompetency, was responsible for "The Invasion of the City of Washington;" and as well for the events of the War of 1812 that lengthened that War and increased its cost of property and lives; and for a conclusion of the War that did not secure the objects for which it was begun, or results at all commensurate with the loss and suffering.

As has been already said, history has a way of repeating itself—and at times this is a very disagreeable performance.

Even after war had waged in Europe for five months of 1914 and all of 1915, the people of the United States were content with their state of very complete military unpreparedness. The nation was as ill prepared, was as incapable of defending itself, of asserting its rights and protecting its citizens, of aiding its friends or upholding right and liberty, as it was in 1812.

In January, 1916, Woodrow Wilson, President of the United States, made a series of notable addresses, to warn the people of this country about its military unpreparedness, to arouse the people to the weakness of the nation as a military force and to the danger in which this placed them, and to point out our rights and obligations. He said:

"There are certain obligations which every American knows that we have undertaken. The first and primary obligation is the maintainance of the integrity of our own sovereignty—which goes as of course. There is also the maintainance of our liberty to develop our political institutions without hindrance, and, last of all, there is the obligation to stand as the strong brother of all those in this hemisphere who will maintain the same principles and follow the same ideals of liberty.

"We stand in the midst of a world which we did not ourselves make and many of the forces of which are only too jealous of those things which we cherish.

"We cannot alter that world overnight. We cannot hold it at arm's length by merely holding up our hands in disapproval and declaring our separation in sympathy and purpose from it. We cannot make it respect us by ignoring it. The hard, ugly fact is that it will heed us only if it certainly knows that our obligation to ourselves and our ideals can and will be met to the utmost and without delay should any one seek to embarrass their fulfillment or to make it impossible * * * *

"But there is something that the American people love better than they love peace. They love the principles upon which their political life is founded. They

are ready at any time to fight for the vindication of their character and their honor.

"They will at no time seek a contest, but they will at no time cravenly avoid it. Because if there is one thing that the country ought to fight for, and that every nation ought to fight for, it is the integrity of its own convictions.

"We can not surrender our convictions. I would rather surrender territory than surrender those ideals which are the staff of life for the soul itself * * *

"There are two sides to the question of preparation. There is not merely the military side—there is the industrial side. And the ideal which I have in mind is this, gentlemen: We ought to have in this country a great system of industrial and vocational education, under Federal guidance and with Federal aid, in which a very large percentage of the youth of this country will be given training in the skillful use and application of the principles of science in maneuver and business. And it will be perfectly feasible and highly desirable to add to that and combine with it such a training in the mechanism and use and care of arms, in the sanitation of camp, in the simpler forms of maneuver and organization, as will make these same men industrially efficient and individually serviceable for national defense.

"The point about such a system will be that its emphasis will lie on the industrial and civil side of life, and that, like all the rest of America, the use of force will only be in the background and as the last resort. So that men will think first of their families and their daily work, of their service in the economic fields of the country, and only last of all of their serviceability to the nation as soldiers and men-at-arms. That is the

ideal of America. But, gentlemen, you cannot create such a system overnight. You cannot create such a system rapidly. It has got to be built up, and I hope it will be built up, by slow and effective stages. And there is something to be done in the meantime. We must see to it that a sufficient body of citizens is given the kind of training which will make them efficient for call into the field in case of necessity."

Here we have the statement of some plain facts, the proof of which is written on almost every page of human history. By the events of the past we must forecast the future. The slow change in the human race makes it plain that it will, at the earliest, be centuries before wars will cease—be centuries before might exercised in some great way or other will not be needed to protect and uphold and preserve the right. Until human nature is so fundamentally and wholly changed that the change cannot be expected for centuries, physical force must be exerted; and at times it will inevitably be on a national scale. Man must be a fighting animal—to live—as long as he continues to exist; when he is no longer a fighting animal he will become extinct; and as long as he is a fighting animal he will fight—to live; for a place in the sun; to protect his offspring; to secure and hold that opportunity and liberty that man above a certain plane counts of more worth than mere life itself.

Here we have, also, in President Wilson's address, an exceedingly gentle statement of a very mod-

est plan and purpose of military preparedness. Not all our citizens, but only "a sufficient body of citizens," is to be given military training. This program is certainly little enough; for a "sufficient" body of citizens to be trained is indefinite enough to be inoffensive. Yet even this not only encountered much opposition, but awakened much opposition. President Wilson deserves no small credit for the less than enough that he urged; for considering the public opinion on military preparedness in January, 1916, he was really bold and radical in his utterances. And he deserves credit for another reason: like Lincoln, he knows that he that will be a true leader of the people, he that will succeed in leading the people, must not put himself so far ahead of them that they will not understand him when he calls to them, and must not seek to lead them too fast. Month after month Lincoln was scolded because he did not advocate more, did not insist on more, and because he was so slow. We know now that in his head and heart he was far in advance of his words; and that he was wise and patriotic enough to be misunderstood because if his words had been as his thoughts and wishes, he could not have led the people at all. At this writing Russia shows only too well the results of such radical attempts to lead, far in advance of the people, that does not lead them except to disaster. Abraham Lincoln is so exalted in the regard of the writer of this that he hesitates even to suggest that

any man has in any way the wisdom and far-sightedness and patience of Lincoln. Yet in that most effective leadership that keeps, not far, but only a little, and always, in the lead, Woodrow Wilson is strangely not unlike Abraham Lincoln. They are strangely not unlike in the contradictions in their public utterances; and doubtless the one is ready to confess, as the other more than once confessed, that clearer vision and surer knowledge have come with unfolding experience, and that growth of mind and of spirit has not been denied or repelled.

But it must be confessed that some might compare James Madison and Woodrow Wilson and find much in common, especially as regards the subject in hand; for Madison's tongue was not dumb nor his pen idle, and they put forth brave words for military preparedness.

It will not be amiss to be vigilant against such things as were done by members of the national administration, and other friends of the President, during the War of 1812, because of political expediency —and which, for example, were clearly responsible for "The Invasion of the City of Washington." There is enough in the past to put wise citizens on the alert, on guard; that these things of political expediency that persisted through the administration of James Madison may not be recorded by the historian of the administration of Woodrow Wilson as having persisted

through his administration, with like results during the war, and relapse into military unpreparedness after the war.*

But whatever may be the characteristics, faults, virtues, weakness or strength of this President or that, and of his satellites, the fact remains that there is need of the true friends of this nation being alert and active to secure for this time and for future years that military preparedness that is the most economical and surest guarantee of peace and to avoid that military unpreparedness that the War of 1812 showed to be so extravagant, wasteful, and disastrous.

The greatest reason for the writing of history is the benefit, as citizens, of those that read it. The errors ot the dead are recorded that the living may read and be warned. The wise deeds and the brave deeds of the dead are put in the printed page that the living, reading that page, may be stirred to emulation. That

---

*The writer is pleased to say that while Madison was a truly great man, a statesman of the first rank, and a pure patriot, as a vigorous believer in war for certain high objects, and as an administrator to secure the vigorous prosecution of war for those objects, Wilson now appears to be head and shoulders above Madison. The progress made by the United States in getting ready to fight during the first year of the present war, though marked by mistakes, confusion, waste and stubborn adhesion to inefficient men and methods—much of which could not reasonably be otherwise than expected—is nevertheless in striking and gratifying contrast in some particulars to the events as well as in disquieting resemblance to others of the like period of the War of 1812.

history which does not connect the events of which it writes with the events of the present, to influence the events of the future, misses no small part of its usefulness. It is believed to be not only allowable, but obligatory, that a history of the event of the War of 1812 most humiliating to the American people—an event due to military unpreparedness—should make plain the probable, the inevitable, events that will come from military unpreparedness at any time in the future.

In his address quoted in this chapter, President Wilson, in admirably terse language, has happily stated a military preparedness remarkable and indeed commendable in its breadth and depth, but lacking in length—it does not go far enough, for only universal military training will give that complete military preparedness that is safe and will escape the inequalities and favoritism that are antagonistic to a democracy. President Wilson's conception of military preparedness is indeed admirable in that it recognizes that the proper preparation includes far more than that which is required on the battlefield itself—that to make war in the best way is now an exceedingly complex undertaking; and in that it recognizes that one of the certain, and chief, results of proper preparation for war is the effect on the people entirely distinct from anything connected with war. One fraction of this effect is that the youth given the right military training is

benefitted individually in several ways, and to such extent that it is not exaggeration to say that in many cases the character is transformed.

Doubtless war reacts for peace. A people tires of war—but the next generation fights. The doors of the temple of Janus are not often moved. It is pleasant to dream of and it is noble to work for, a court of nations or a league for peace that will not permit war; but war can be prevented only by force, and the exercise of force, if it is not war from the beginning, will lead to war! The only safety, and, as pointed out by Washington, the true economy, is in being ready to fight. We must not longer be misled by those that see only evil in an army and a navy, no matter what conditions may exist. We must not after the close of the present war allow the American nation to be defenseless, as it was a hundred years ago, as it was scarce a year ago. We must not delude ourselves that all other nations are kind and benevolent; that they all have, not only all the room in the sun that they need, but all that they want; and that there is not among them, nor will there be, men of ambition that would gain power and make a name by even the horrors of war. We know that human nature has not much changed for the better in the last hundred years; that where in one nation men have gone up and forward a little, in others they have slipped down and back. If we are wise and honest with the events of

history we will act as if men will not much change for the better during the next hundred years. And therefore we will, as patriots, and as good friends of the weak or oppressed everywhere, avoid that military unpreparedness that invited, and will always invite, such humiliating events as "The Invasion of the City of Washington."

4.

MADISON AND FOUR OTHERS

The battle near Bladensburg, a few miles from Washington, was the only battle of "The Invasion of the City of Washington." On the American side it was so notably a contest among public officials and a conflict of officers, rather than a fight by soldiers, that to understand it we must, first of all, know something about certain of the officials and officers that had much to do with that battle.

First of all is to be considered James Madison, President of the United States and Commander-in-Chief of the Army and Navy of the United States.

It was unfortunate for Madison and much more unfortunate for his country, that his heart was never in the War. He was a man of peace. He was 24 years of age when the farmers assembled at Concord fired the shot heard round the world, but the sound of it did not reach his ears as a call to arms, and at no time did he serve in the Continental army in any capacity.

His choice of employment during the War of the Revolution was doubtless a wise one, for he was fitted to serve the colonies much better in civil than in military employment; and during the eight years of war he was indeed able, industrious and helpful. Our quarrel is not with him because during the Revolution he was not a soldier, but with the fate that made him President during "The Second War of Independence."

In "The Battle of Plattsburg" the author has this to say of Madison:

"Madison was a man of irreproachable character. He was a patriot. He was a man of profound thought and great scholarship. He had been a Federalist. He wrote twenty-nine of the eighty-five numbers of "The Federalist"—Jay contributed only five numbers, and Hamilton the rest. When he graduated from Princeton he remained a year longer to study Hebrew. He was justly renowned as a thinker and writer on government; but his liking for theology was fully as strong as for the science of government, and had he been born at a different time he would probably have been a professor of theology and then president of Princeton, or some other college, in which he would have been also professor of Hebrew or theology or government. He was a man of very great ability. That the national constitution was accepted by the states was probably due more to him than to any one else. He broke with old friends and had bitter ene-

mies, but his honesty or virtue was never questione
Naturally enough, the dominant element in his a
ministration was, in its own estimation, at least, sch
lastic and philosophical; and it had the characte
istics of the soi-disant scholarly 'statesman' of the
time—and later dates—who was pleased not to be
'practical.' There was indeed one prominent exception—the commonsense, positive, bold Monroe. If, before the destruction of the capitol he had been secretary of war instead of secretary of state, the course of the War would have been different. Madison ha
argued for universal military training and for a standing army and a navy sufficient for defense. He di
this when eloquently endeavoring to secure the adop
tion of the national constitution. This required re
moral courage, for the people of that time gr
feared, and were bitterly opposed to, a standing
'How could a readiness for war in time of peac
safely prohibited, unless we could prohibit, in
manner, the preparations and establishments of e
hostile nation?' he asked in The Federalist. 'If,'
continued, 'one nation maintains constantly a d
plined army, ready for the service of ambition c
venge, it obliges the most pacific nations, who ma
within the reach of its enterprises, to take corresp
ing precautions. ....The veteran legio
Rome were an overmatch for the undisciplined
of all other nations, and rendered her mistres
world.'

"That was written in 1788. Immediately following what has just been quoted he wrote: 'Not the less true is it that the liberties of Rome proved the final victim of her military triumphs; and that the liberties of Europe, as far as they ever existed, have, with few exceptions, been the price of her military establishments. A standing force, therefore, is dangerous.'

"This view grew more and more in his mind, to the exclusion of the need of military preparedness for national defense. His genius was for scholarship and theology and literature and philosophy rather than practical statesmanship and wise administration. He was by nature antagonistic to war, to force. Jefferson, his warmest admirer and friend, said of him that [illegible] nature and method were 'soothing always the feel[illegible]s of his adversaries by civilities and softness of [illegible]ression.' He was, in early life, exceedingly diffi[illegible]nt; almost timid. Few have reached higher planes [illegible] thought or spiritual or patriotic expression; but, [illegible]ith Britain and France not only at war already in[illegible]lving or threatening to involve all nations that could [illegible]ly fight, he was content with embargo and 'non[illegible]ercourse' and beautifully worded remonstrances, [illegible] no effective effort was made to get, equip and [illegible]n soldiers or to build up a navy. 'What has [illegible]ght on other nations those immense debts,' he [illegible] 'under the pressure of which many of them la[illegible] [illegible]ot the expenses of their government, but war.'

He was opposed to war. He entered into war reluctantly. Doubtless he never forgot that in allying himself with the war party he had parted from his early political friends—the Federalists. Doubtless his heart was not in the war; but he was by birth of the section that favored the war, and he went with his section. And though his heart had been in the war, his administration would probably not have been more successful in the prosecution of the war. He became stubbornly deaf to advice.

"Inevitably a President is pressed around by subtly intrusive selfish or silly sycophants who know the power of flattery. A President is continually told, if he will listen to it, if he will not positively refuse to listen to it—and unfortunately it is not characteristic of human beings to dread 'praise, not blame'—that he is the greatest statesman and ablest administrator that ever occupied his exalted position; and unless he is quite exceptional, he comes to believe some or much of this and to less or greater degree refuses to listen to criticism, resents advice, constantly seeks greater power, is more and more in sympathy with men and measures that take from the liberties of the people, and undertakes more and more the direction of that for the proper direction of which he lacks ability or energy, or both. He is content with inefficient officials and aids, for, he having chosen them, they must be the best that can be had! The War of 1812 was pro-

longed and its conclusion was unsatisfactory, lives were sacrificed, hardships were put upon the people, because the national administration attempted what was, for it, impossible; would not supplant the inefficient of men and methods with the efficient; and at times was successful in accomplishing the astoundingly inopportune and inadvisable, if not actually criminal.

"Yet time has been kinder to Madison than it has been to his critics, and for this we may all well be content. It has preserved a remembrance of his good qualities rather than of his shortcomings. Before he became President, even before he became Jefferson's Secretary of State, he had given to his country a vast service that required the highest and greatest and most varied of talents coupled with true patriotism and prodigious industry. If he had never been President he would nevertheless merit very nearly as much praise and gratitude from the American people as any one in all our history. Possibly the Presidency took from his high fame rather than added to it. And it is certain that of those that criticised him during the War, a good many would better have kept silent. Some there were who criticised with wisdom from patriotic motives; and it would have been better for Madison and the country he loved if he had listened to these critics. He was not perfect. He was ill-suited to be a war President. But he was patriotic. So were some of his critics. But not all—not some of the loudest, that sought most to hector and hinder."

As already stated, Madison was a university graduate, but never a soldier. James Monroe, born in 1758, left William and Mary College in 1776 to enter the Revolutionary Army as a cadet. He was descended from Captain Monroe, an officer in the army of Charles I. Monroe was in the army only a short time when he was made a lieutenant. He was active and showed real military ability during the campaign on the Hudson, and in the battle at Trenton he led a small detachment that captured a British battery—receiving as a result a ball in the shoulder and a captain's commission. He was soon made a major and as aide-de-camp to Lord Sterling he served brilliantly in the campaigns of 1777 and 1778, showing undoubted bravery and unusual energy and resource and military talent in the battles of Brandywine, Germantown and Monmouth. But by taking the position of aide-de-camp to Lord Sterling he had lost his rank in the regular line, and as he was never given to flattery or intrigue and would not practice the "diplomacy" of those days, he was denied entrance into the army as a commissioned officer. As a result, he began the study of law under the direction of Jefferson, at that time governor of Virginia. But in a short time he was organizing the militia of the lower counties of his state and Jefferson sent him as military commissioner to the army in South Carolina. All his life he had a liking for the military and when, during the War of 1812, he was addressed as

"Colonel" Monroe, he was greatly pleased; and those that write of that War, especially if military men, most often speak of him as Colonel Monroe, although the highest military rank he had ever had was that of Major, while he had held very high civil positions and at the time was Secretary of State.

In 1782 he was elected to the Virginia assembly, and by that body he was appointed a member of the executive council although he was only 23 years of age. In 1783 he was elected to Congress for three years. He was ineligible for re-election for three years, else he would undoubtedly have succeeded himself. In 1787 he was re-elected to the Virginia assembly, and the next year he was chosen a delegate to the Virginia convention to act on the adoption of the federal constitution. There was an especial appropriateness in this, for—and this should never be forgotten by the people of the United States—while a member of congress he became convinced that the old articles of confederation must always prove lame, ineffective and incompetent, and in 1785 he advocated an extension of the powers of congress and introduced a resolution to give congress authority to regulate trade between the States. This resolution was referred to a committee of which he was chairman. It was favorably reported, and it was this which led to the convention at Annapolis, and later to the federal constitution.

However, when the federal constitution was submitted to the Virginia convention, Monroe was one

of the minority that felt compelled to oppose it, believing that it gave too much power to the federal government. The majority of the people of Virginia supported the minority and Monroe was elected United States Senator in 1790. In 1794 he was appointed minister to France. He was exceedingly popular in that country, but his attitude towards Great Britain led to his recall in 1796. From 1799 to 1802 he was governor of Virginia. At the close of his term he was appointed envoy extraordinary to the French government to negotiate for the purchase of Louisiana, and in this undertaking he was able and successful. As soon as this purchase was accomplished he was sent as minister plenipotentiary to England, but soon was sent to Madrid as minister extraordinary and plenipotentiary. In 1806 he was returned to England as minister extraordinary. He was not successful at either Madrid or London. Possibly no one could have been. But Monroe had little patience with the ways of diplomacy of that period. He was the first one to practice "shirt sleeve diplomacy." His blunt announcement of what is known as the "Monroe Doctrine" is a good example of his methods and language. That doctrine may have suited the purposes of Great Britain, but to say, as is frequently done nowadays, that Monroe announced this doctrine at the suggestion of Great Britain, is as silly as it is untruthful, and it is the limit of both. Monroe had no love or respect for Great Britain and while the men in the government

of the British Kingdom in those years were dense and often stupid and foolish, they were not so stupid as to think that if they suggested anything to Monroe it would, on that account, be regarded favorably by him, or by the people of the United States. They knew that the effect would be the contrary.

In 1808, Monroe was the choice of many, possibly a majority, of the Republican party for President, but President Jefferson favored Madison, and this made Madison President. In 1810 Monroe was elected for the third time to the Virginia assembly and the next year he was again elected governor of the state. In the same year he became Madison's Secretary of State, and he was holding that office at the time of "The Invasion of the City of Washington." From the beginning of Madison's administration he was an avowed candidate for the Presidency as Madison's successor, as was, for some time before "The Invasion of the City of Washington," John Armstrong, the Secretary of War; and to the political maneuvering of Monroe and Armstrong and their friends, having in view the Presidential election of 1816, were due many of the military moves during that fateful year of 1814. We can not have an intelligent understanding of the events of the War of 1812, we can not understand aright, or pass a correct judgment on, the event of "The Invasion of the City of Washington," if we do not know of and consider the partisan political forces, the ambition for office, and the fierce feeling and bitter

rivalry between the two political parties of that period, and especially the maneuvers and plottings of and for the two principal candidates for the next nomination for the Presidency by the Republican party.

This rivalry for the nomination for the Presidency led to certain events just preceding and after the battle near Bladensburg that would be amusing were they not so tragic. An example is Armstrong's leaving his office in Washington, where he was needed, to "go into the field" and from there sending others to report to him on the enemy's movements; and Monroe, not to be outdone by the Secretary of War, "going him one better" and actually heading a scouting party! More of this in subsequent pages.

We may be sure, however, that Monroe never did anything that he had the least thought would be injurious to his country. He was ambitious—nobly ambitious; he wished to be President—and surely that was neither a weakness nor a crime; but he was always a patriot, whose honesty and sincerity could not be doubted. If ever the history of our country is studied in our schools and homes as it should be, the fame of Monroe will be greater and brighter than it is now, and few indeed among our public men will have more of the respect and gratitude of the American people. It was no accident that his administration was such that it soon ushered in "The Era of Good Feeling," in which party lines were almost effaced and in which party feeling almost died out. It was no

accident that when he traveled extensively among the people while he was President, he was received everywhere, by all the people, with profound respect and real affection.

John Armstrong, the Secretary of War, had participated actively in the War of the Revolution. Born in 1758, he entered the Revolutionary army as a volunteer when 18 years of age. He was one of General Mercer's aids at the battle of Princeton and when that general was mortally wounded, it was Armstrong that bore him from the field. Later Armstrong joined the army of General Gates and became a great favorite of that general, and served under him, with the rank of major, until the end of the war. He was a brave and capable soldier. The reputation he gained as a soldier in the war of the Revolution was very creditable—although this reputation was dimmed for a time by "the Newburg correspondence," it was soon seen that his part in this affair was dictated by good motives and it added to, rather than detracted from, the high esteem in which he was held in military circles.

While the Revolutionary Army was encamped at Newburg, N. Y., in the winter of 1782-3, the arrearages of pay, which had become really serious, occasioned, and reasonably enough, great anxiety among both the private soldiers and the officers. Application for relief was made to congress, but without success. As a result, a meeting of officers for March 11, 1783, to discuss their grievances, was anonymously called

In an anonymous address, the writer of it called on his comrades in arms, in strong language, to refuse to perform further military duty during the war, and at the conclusion of the war to refuse to lay down their arms until their just demands were satisfied. At once Washington issued a call for a like meeting, for the 15th of the same month. Washington, in his call, promised a free discussion of all claims and demands. Immediately another anonymous address was issued, from the same source as the first, in which it was made to appear, to the satisfaction of the author of the address, that the action of Washington was an approval of the first address. At the meeting on the 15th Washington addressed the officers, with unusual warmth for him and showing great feeling. He assured the officers that he wished to aid them in every proper way to secure satisfaction of all their just demands, that he would do all that he could to secure that satisfaction, and he begged them not to take the dangerous and extreme action advocated in the anonymous addresses. His plea to the officers was acknowledged by all to be very earnest and well framed, and very eloquent—and so true was this that he gained all that he asked of the officers; and shortly afterwards he obtained from congress action that redressed the grievances of the soldiers, both privates and officers.

It was soon known that it was Armstrong that had written these anonymous addresses. While it was equally well known that he had written the ad-

dresses on the request of a large number of his fellow officers, all the blame was put on him. He was very severely blamed. Some did not hesitate to say that what he had done, and what he had advocated, were highly treasonable. Even the mildest and friendliest of his critics pointed out that what he had done and what he had advocated were dangerous insubordination in an army, doubly culpable during a time of actual war. Among his severest critics for a time was Washington himself. One can readily understand that Washington would regard these addresses with extreme disfavor. But that illustrious man was first of all just, and in time, when he fully understood all the conditions and circumstances, and had time for careful consideration, he changed altogether in his attitude towards Armstrong and was his friend.

It was not on account of his military achievements or experience, however, that Armstrong was appointed Secretary of War. It would have been too much to expect of the Madison administration that, for this very responsible place when the nation was in the midst of war with the powerful British Kingdom, it would select the man best fitted for the place. The Madison administration—and in this it is not singular among the national administrations of the early decades of our national existence or far removed from certain national administrations of our later history—always had in view partisan political conditions, considerations and results. Back of the selection of

Armstrong were political conditions, and Armstrong was made Secretary of War, not because of any especial qualifications for that place, but because his appointment might win political support to the national administration, and also give it aid in naming its favorite for President in 1816; especially in two states of much influence in which it needed friends and a friendly sentiment—Pennsylvania and New York. Armstrong was a native of one and a prominent citizen of the other.

There was a further reason for the selection of Armstrong, political in its nature—as already remarked, a reason of this nature was reasonably to be expected of the Madison administration; the War was unpopular in Pennsylvania and New York and the national administration was equally unpopular in those states, and Madison and his advisers believed that by appointing Armstrong the War could be and would be made more popular in both of these important states. Unfortunately, the Madison administration had not learned that the way to make a war—and a national administration conducting the war—popular with the people of the United States, is to put in all positions of direction or command the men best fitted for these positions and that will most ably, energetically and successfully prosecute the war, regardless of all political considerations. For the conduct of the nation's affairs during

a war or time of great events, the politicians are too knowing to be wise, too shrewd and cunning to have that foresight which is essential to the greatest success.

To understand fully the political reasons for Armstrong's appointment, we must know a little of his personal history. He was born at Carlisle, Pa. He was a citizen of that state during the war of the Revolution, and subsequently was elected Secretary of State of Pennsylvania and later was a member of the old congress from that state. In November, 1800, he was chosen U. S. Senator from New York. In 1804 he was sent as minister to France and he also acted as minister to Spain. His position in Paris was difficult, and he filled it with real ability. At the outbreak of the War of 1812 he was made a brigadier-general and given command of the important military district which included the city of New York. In 1813 he was appointed Secretary of War. Of his work in that department we are interested in only that which is directly connected with "The Invasion of the City of Washington," and that properly belongs to subsequent chapters. As a result of the burning of the national capitol, Armstrong was severely censured; and because he believed that censure unjust, and because Madison, whom he believed should have acted to remove that censure, did rather the contrary, he resigned as Secretary of War not long after "The Invasion of the City of Washington." During his after

years he made diligent use of his pen. He was much and directly interested in rural pursuits and he wrote two treatises, and excellent ones, on farming and gardening. He wrote a history of the War of 1812, of real value but inevitably showing no small bias. He wrote a very animated criticism of Wilkinson's Memoirs, a number of biographical sketches, and also partly prepared a history of the War of the Revolution. He died at Red Hook, New York, in 1843.

It will be seen that his selection, by an administration that always regarded political conditions, was logical. Wishing never to do any injustice to the honest and patriotic, and also able and justly renowned Madison, I wish to say again that because he and his advisers put partisan political advantage so often at the head of the things to be considered, we must not judge him or them as harshly as we properly would had they lived and acted at a later date. Partisan feeling and prejudice and maneuvering were far more highly regarded then than now. Further, the greatest consideration for partisan success might be, at that time, compatible with the purest patriotism—that intense desire for political success that led to acts which would now be condemned was then often, and undoubtedly in the case of Madison was, the result of pure and ardent patriotism. Different modes and degrees of self government were yet experimental and therefore subjects of academic discussion; and academic discussion always becomes heated and engen-

ders intense feeling rather than the calm consideration of facts. The members of the two political parties, and which parties were founded on honest, but diverse, beliefs in the capacity of the people to govern themselves, firmly, and often fiercely, believed that the future of the government and of the welfare of the people, depended on the triumph of their party. With the most patriotic impulses and ardor the opposing party was feared and fought. At the distance of more than a hundred years it is easy to see that Madison was too much of a politician and partisan to be a great President; and it is equally clear that he and most of his friends and advisers were partisans because they were patriots—they believed beyond doubt that the success of their party and that for which it stood, was essential to the security, prosperity and happiness of the people; and to the firm continuance, and wise distribution of powers, of the national and state governments.

Armstrong was ill-adapted to any executive office. While he was not at all inclined to protracted work, he was yet less disposed to leave details to others. But as an executive officer he failed most because of his ill temper and excessive egotism. He resented suggestions from anyone. In most cases the fact that a certain measure was recommended by some one else was to him sufficient reason to oppose it. Apparently he found very little pleasure in life, and of that very little much the greater part came from being churlish and

exceedingly discourteous to those that had business to transact with him. His only argument was that the other party was more than mistaken—what he said he knew to be untrue. The few that saw, during July and August, 1814, what was about to occur and, urged on by patriotic concern, sought to warn Armstrong and, in some cases, to suggest measures of adequate defense, had for sole reward contemptuous or abusive words. Because of these unfortunate traits of character and faults of conduct, it was easy to create public opinion against Armstrong and to have accepted as true the pronouncements of committees and individual members of congress, of newspapers, and of the horde of small public officials, that took the blame for "The Invasion of the City of Washington" away from Madison and Monroe and their lackeys and satellites—where some of it belonged—and put some of it on Armstrong—where some did belong—and on Winder—where a very little of it may have belonged—and most of it on the common soldiers—where none of it belonged.

I have consulted several dictionaries and as a result have been forced to the conclusion that the Americans did not have an army at Bladensburg. If the lexicographers are men competent for their work, four things are required to make an army:

First, a considerable number of men.

Second, these men armed for war.

Third, these men organized into several classes of divisions.

Fourth, these men under proper officers.

At Bladensburg the Americans had assembled a considerable number of men, but it is not altogether true that they were armed for war and they certainly were not organized as an army must be to be an army, and there is no doubt that they were not under proper officers.

But if the Americans lacked an army, they had four commanders on the field! And all of these four commanders acted independently, each gave orders without consulting the others, and they gave orders direct to the troops, and not through another of the four or the one of the four that had been designated as having the immediate command. If anything has been well settled in matters military, it is that more than one commander is a superfluity plus. Four commanders has yet to be given a name or class in the chapter of "Military Afflictions that are Inevitably Fatal."

The four commanders at Bladensburg were:

James Madison, Commander-in-Chief of the Army and Navy of the United States.

"Colonel" Monroe, Secretary of State, and on occasion head of a scouting party.

John Armstrong, who stated himself to be "late a major-general in the Army of the United States', and Secretary of War."

W. H. Winder, brigadier-general, supposed to be the general in command of the army.

As has been previously remarked, it would be expecting too much of the Madison administration to expect it to appoint to the command of the soldiers assembled for the defense of Washington, the man best fitted for the place because of his military training, ability and achievement. That administration regarded everything, even military affairs, from the politician's point of view; and even in the critical days when the national capital was threatened, political expediency was put above military merit in selecting the commander of the American forces; and, as in the appointment of Armstrong as Secretary of War, the appointment of Winder was made because it was believed that the first consideration was to make the War (and the national administration) popular, and that the best way to do this was, not to fight the war to a successful conclusion with all the speed that efficiency and energy would secure, but to appoint to important commands men closely associated with powerful politicians or popular in certain states.

Up to the time Winder was appointed to the command of the newly created military district that included the City of Washington—a district so created that the plain task of its commander was to assemble, organize, equip and command, with the co-operation of the national administration, an army for the defense of the national capitol—his military experience had

been limited, his military achievements had been hardly creditable, and he had given no evidence of any extraordinary ability as a commander. He had recently returned from "a long imprisonment in Canada, the consequence of his capture by the enemy during a night attack on our troops under General Chandler at Stony Creek on the 3rd of June, 1813." There were some peculiar features about this capture, and of them some were never explained. Apparently all the facts about this capture were never revealed. Winder's senior in command, General Chandler, was captured at the same time. In the official letter to the commanding general that reports this occurrence, it is spoken of as "the unfortunate capture of Brigadier-generals Chandler and Winder, who were taken in the action, unknown to any part of the army, and hurried into the enemy's lines." Just how these two generals could be captured "unknown to any part of the army" was never explained. In his report to the Secretary of War, General Dearborn called the capture "a strange fatality." Major-general Morgan Lewis, who succeeded Dearborn, made it appear in a later communication to the War Department that no censure properly rested on General Winder.

Previous to his appointment as commander of the forces to oppose the British near Washington, General Winder had never had any important command or an independent command. Not his military experi-

ence or ability, but, as already stated, the expediency of politicians, was responsible for his selection.

As shown in "The Battle of Plattsburg," the War was unpopular in Maryland—very unpopular among the most intelligent and able people of that state. This included those prominent in political affairs; and we may be sure that this would give deep concern to the Madison administration. The chief, but, of course, not the only reason for the opposition to the War in Maryland were the efforts, sometimes brutal and nearly always unnecessary, to suppress free speech and a free press. The first blood shed in the War of 1812, as in the Civil War, was American blood shed by Americans in the city of Baltimore. In the case of the War of 1812, this blood was shed in the effort, by mob methods, to destroy a free press. This occurrence aroused a sentiment that was made bitter by the unnecessary and silly, and at times offensive and treasonable, measures of officers of the national government to prohibit free speech and destroy a free press—treasonable because such measures struck directly at those rights and liberties that the people and their ancestors had fought to obtain and preserve, and on which the government so lately achieved rested as on a foundation. Prosecuting attorneys, full of the fanatical zeal of small minds and petty tyrants, and a zeal assumed by spies and traitors, took upon themselves the powers of judges. Judges of like character abused and ridiculed those brought to trial and, reversing the

maxim that the accused is to be considered innocent until proved to be guilty, heaped opprobrium upon the accused as if already convicted and at times acted as judge, jury and prosecuting attorney. Sheriffs and constables arrested citizens without warrants, on suspicion, and put themselves with the judges and prosecutors among lawbreakers by treating with contempt the articles of legal procedure that are among the things essential to make the citizen secure in "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." The result was that bitter feeling—all the more bitter because its expression was so ruthlessly suppressed—that such procedure must inevitably produce among a vigorous, liberty loving people descended from those that had formulated the Magna Charta and had promulgated the Declaration of Independence.

It is only justice to the Madison administration to say that it had often good reason to curb the utterances of public speakers and writers. Violently seditious and actually treasonable utterances were not rare. Further, when the nation is at war because of the action, according to the national constitution, of the designated officials, war must be taken as the deliberate act of the nation, and whatever may be the opinion of the individual, his duty as a citizen is plain and it is to refrain from criticism of the decision made to go to war, and to do his share to bring the victory to his nation. The Madison administration may be justly criticised because it confounded the conduct of

the War by the national government with the War itself and at times prosecuted, and persecuted by illegal methods, those that did not oppose the War or measures to advance it, but criticised the inefficiency and incapacity of the administration in the conduct of the War. What made this all the more effective in arousing resentment was the strange leniency of the administration at times which took no notice of really seditious utterances or actions. The Madison administration often permitted greater freedom of speech and of the press than is permitted now. It did not imprison any one for any criticism of the physical appearance of any public official. Among the faults of its attitude toward free speech and a free press were vacillation and inconsistency; and because of this the public resentment was all the greater. Also, in those days the people were more jealous of free speech and a free press than they are today.

The generally unnecessary and sometimes grossly illegal measures to suppress free speech and a free press, were more resented in Maryland than in any other part of the country. The feeling that existed in Maryland was shown by the preamble and resolutions adopted by the Maryland legislature, and quoted in The Battle of Plattsburg.

In the opinion of the national administration, the first step—and the shrewd step of the politician—to protect Washington was to placate the Marylanders by appointing to the command of the army that was

to defend Washington, a Marylander and a relative of the governor of Maryland and bearing the same name! Hence Winder.

As regards the appointment of Winder, General Armstrong was undoubtedly right* when he wrote in his "Notices" (in two volumes):

"The error of first occurrence in this campaign belongs exclusively to the administration, and will be found in the selection made of a commanding general, not on the ground of distinguished professional service or knowledge, but simply on a presumption that, 'being a native of Maryland, and a relative of the governor, Brigadier-general Winder would be useful in mitigating the opposition to the War, and in giving increased efficiency to the national measures within the limits of the state;' an opinion which, though somewhat plausible, was wholly unsustained by the event."

More will be said of General Winder in subsequent chapters. It may properly, and justly, be observed here that the task put on him was very difficult; and, with James Madison for President and Monroe and Armstrong occupying the offices they did, it was impossible. Winder was not without military ability; he was energetic, earnest and exceedingly industrious; and he was patriotic. If he had been a Macomb or a Jackson, and—even more important—could have done something similar to Dewey's cutting the

*See Annals of Congress, 1st and 2nd sessions of the 14th Congress.

cable, and thus have rid himself of the interference and contrary purposes of Madison, Monroe and Armstrong, he would not only have defeated the British army that fought at Bladensburg, but would have annihilated or captured it.

Possibly the reader will be surprised that space be given here to General James Wilkinson. He was not in command of any part of the forces assembled for the defense of Washington. In fact, during July and August, 1814, he was under arrest and awaiting trial by court-martial. Before this he had been accused of treason, had been tried, and acquitted, and then given command of all the armies of the United States. The expedition he had commanded on the northern frontier during the War had been a failure; but if every one in command of forces on the northern frontier that had not been victorious, had been court-martialed, there would have been real need of the War Department doing what it did without need when Wilkinson was court-martialed; go beyond the law and appoint an assistant prosecutor—rather, an acting principal prosecutor—whose appointment was illegal. But Madison's administration has probably not been the only one some of the officials of which have come to believe themselves so wise and exalted that they were far above the laws of their country. Notwithstanding that he had been accused of drunkenness, of obscenity, of insubordination, and of inefficiency, when in a highly important position of command, and was

under arrest, it is certain that both Madison and Armstrong consulted Wilkinson when the capital was threatened—and gave no heed to his advice; yet on account of his aggressive character as well as his high reputation as a military man, his recommendations influenced others, including officers in the army assembled to defend Washington, and both before and after "The Invasion of the City of Washington," he had, in shaping events and moulding public opinion, as much real influence as Armstrong and much more than Winder. Doubtless one reason why in the summer of 1814 he was not, at the least, ignored by Madison and the administration, was that he was a Marylander, and had influential family and political connections. He was born in Calvert county, Maryland. He declared his great satisfaction, gratitude and pride in "the accidental circumstance of birth" having been, in his case, in "the urbane, loyal, generous, gallant state of Maryland!" His birthplace was about three miles from "the decayed village" of Benedict, made prominent in connection with the destruction of Washington by the debarkation of the British detachment under command of Major-general Ross which fought at Bladensburg and burned the national capitol. He was justified in claiming that his family was "ancient and respectable." His ancestors were all English and the earliest of them to come to America reached Maryland in the sixteenth century. His mother was a noble-minded woman that he fervently loved and deeply re-

vered. When twelve years of age he made his first notable journey "to the town of Baltimore, for the purpose of being inoculated for the smallpox. This disease in the natural way, was as frightful in those days as the plague in London in the year 1665, and inoculation was considered an occult art, professed at that period in the Southern states by a Doctor Stevenson only, who by his success acquired great celebrity." He "read the Latin classics, and studied the inferior branches of mathematics" under a private tutor. He was "put to the study of medicine" under an eminent physician who had served during the war of 1756, and delighted to recount the defeat of Braddock at Pittsburg and Wolfe's victory on the Plains of Abraham. In his seventeenth year he was sent to the medical school in Philadelphia. He had begun the practice of medicine in Maryland when "the abortive enterprise of General Gage against the town of Concord in Massachusetts, on the 19th of April," caused him to shoulder "a firelock in Georgetown, Potomack"—now the District of Columbia. He was a member of "an independent company, commanded by Captain Thomas Richardson, a Quaker, from Rhode Island." He resided "thirty miles from the place of parade, but was punctual to the rendezvous"—the company was drilled once a week.

The foregoing is given space, because at the time of the Chesapeake expedition General Wilkinson was, as already indicated, a man of such consequence, had

such a place in the public eye, and his criticisms had such consideration, that we may well know this much of his family, education and early attainments. But at least as strong a reason for giving space to these facts about him, are the glimpses they give of the conditions of life and popular thought and feeling at that period. For example, consider that the independent company to which the young Doctor Wilkinson attached himself was commanded and drilled by a Quaker, and from Rhode Island! What was it that put into the hearts of all real men the fierce desire to fight that would not be denied? At that time liberty meant much less and also much more to the plain people than it means today. It meant enough to overcome the most intense and fanatical religious beliefs, the beliefs of martyrs. The Mennonite ancestors of the author were hunted like wild beasts, were murdered and tortured and starved and driven into the mountain refuges of Switzerland, because they would not bear arms. In war they could see only wholesale murder—a violation of the command, "Thou shalt not kill." They preferred torture, starvation and death to that eternal hell fire that was the inevitable reward of the murderer. Yet when they had come to America and the news came of Lexington and Concord, they changed their opinion about war and hell fire. Did something tell them that to fight and die for liberty for their children and neighbors on earth might be an exceedingly good argument with St. Peter for admission to heaven? At any rate,

everyone of them, some boys and some old men, fought for the Revolution; and the younger ones of them, if yet alive, fought again in the War of 1812. What was true of them was true of thousands; and this must be considered—not a few in the forces of the War of 1812 were veterans of the War of the Revolution. They were not cowards. They fought with their sons and the sons of brave soldiers of the Revolution. These sons were not cowards. That ardor for Opportunity and Liberty that made the Quaker and the Mennonite into soldiers, and soldiers that imprinted their unconquerable devotion with the blood of their bare feet, on the snow and frozen ground of winter, had not cooled, nor was it lacking in the hearts of their sons, in the days of "Our Second War of Independence."

When news of the attack "at Breed's hill, the 17th of June," reached Doctor Wilkinson, he determined "not to await the tardy proceedings of committees and conventions, then engaged in organizing a regiment; but, unrestrained by the admonitions of friends and relations," he abandoned his "profession forever," and, at his own expense, "repaired to the camp before Boston, and as a volunteer, joined the rifle corps under the gallant Colonel William Thompson of Pennsylvania."

For further biography of Wilkinson the reader is referred to the encyclopedias. It will be found that he was accused of meanness and high crimes, that he was

tried for treason and acquitted; that many believed him to be a traitor, and some, at least, were sure that he was a patriot. The truth doubtless is that he was unduly ambitious, that by some his attainments were over-rated, and that his crimes and misdemeanors were, at the least, greatly exaggerated. He lacked diplomacy and cunning, and he lived during a period of intrigue, cabal, and practices of public officials that now would not be tolerated; when those that expressed the loftiest ideas of patriotism, in beautiful language, were constantly guilty of treachery to the public interests as well as to friends, in order to further personal ambitions. To understand those times and the public men and the masses of those times, we must remember that there were no public schools in half of the states, and where they did exist they had deteriorated for more than fifty years; there were no railroads or telegraphs; there were few newspapers, with few readers; the people were easily led and misled by violent language, and were narrow-minded and fanatical; the people travelled little; very few of the masses wrote or received letters; ministers occasionally got drunk without much or any scandal; some people were yet in doubt about women having souls; there was much preaching, praying, fasting and immorality; and the degree of honesty and the regard for the public welfare expected of public officials were not much higher than prevailed to a considerable extent

for some years lately terminated, and to some limited extent may yet prevail, among the officials of railways and other big corporations.

If only justly accused, and judged by the standards of his time, Wilkinson would probably be pronounced a good citizen. What concerns us is that he was a student of strategy and tactics, his military ability was by many very highly regarded, and, in truth, his criticisms of military affairs and actions were, when stripped of his violent prejudices, often intelligent and valuable. It would only weary the reader to transfer to these pages his minute and technical criticism of the American military operations against the Chesapeake expedition. We are not now interested in the exact location in which he would have posted this company or that detachment. Any unprejudiced student of the military operations in the vicinity of Washington will reach the conclusion, however, that Wilkinson's strategy and tactics were the strategy and tactics that should have been used. Further, he was able to show that he had advocated this strategy and these tactics some weeks in advance of the destruction of the capitol, and had not waited to announce them until after that event.

This chapter cannot be better or more fittingly closed than with the following extract from Wilkinson's "Memoirs"—published in three bulky, but interesting, volumes:

"Cicero says that 'it is the first law of history that

the writer shall neither dare to advance what is false, nor to suppress what is true; that he shall relate the facts with strict impartiality, free from ill will or favor; that his narrative should distinguish the order of time, and, when necessary, give the description of places; that he should unfold the statesman's motives, and in his accounts of the transactions and events, interpose his own judgment; and should not only relate what was done, but how it was done, and what share chance, or rashness, or prudence had in the issue: that he should give the characters of the leading men, their weight and influence, their passions, their principles, and conduct through life.' "

5.

HAVING EYES, SEE NOT.

The national authorities had ample warning of an attack on the national capital. In the early spring of 1813 Admiral Cockburn entered the Chesapeake with a considerable naval force, including marines. On April 24th of that year he destroyed the military equipments and munitions stored at Frenchtown, near the head of the bay. This was followed by the pillage and destruction of private property for some weeks, when Cockburn descended the bay to join Admiral Warren, who had arrived with naval reinforcements, more marines, and the "Chasseurs Brittanniques"—a corps composed very largely of foreign renegades and ruffians, all the officers, however, being British. On the 22nd of June the attempt was made on Craney Island and on the 25th and the following night occurred the horrors of Hampton. About the middle of July Admiral Warren entered the Potomac with a considerable force, took possession of Blackstone's Island, and took soundings as high up as Kettle Bottoms. This indi-

cated an attack on the national capital. At that time there was no defense of the national capital, by land or water, that could have withstood five hundred moderately good troops fairly well equipped; yet the House Committee on Military Affairs, to which had been referred a motion of Mr. Stuart, a veteran of the Revolution, to distribute arms and embody the militia of the district, reported: "That they have examined into the state of preparation, naval and military, made to receive the enemy, and are satisfied that the preparation is, in every respect, adequate to the emergency, and that no measures are necessary on the part of the House to make it more complete."

As a matter of fact, no preparations whatever had been made to receive the enemy. That a committee of the House should make such a report when the conditions were such as they were, would be unbelieveable were it not that at a more recent date in our history a committee of congress has actually accomplished as fine a whitewashing report to shield and please as incompetent a cabinet officer as the Secretary of War July 15, 1813.

Mr. Stuart made his motion one day and the Committee on Military Affairs made its report early the next day. It could not have made any investigation beyond Washington. Probably its report was written in the office of the Secretary of War, if not by him.

There is much in the official management of the

War of 1812 to be studied with profit—not to reveal that which is to be followed, but that which is to be avoided.

Fortunately for us, that the national capital was as defenseless as it was; that the national administration was as feeble and innocuous, while wise in its own conceit, as it was; and that congress was as subservient and lazy as it was; were so altogether incredible that the British commanders had no suspicion of the real conditions.

In the autumn the British forces left the Chesapeake. There was rather free intercourse between the British forces and the inhabitants of the country near the Chesapeake and as a result those inhabitants were certain that the British intended to return the next Spring. The national administration was equally certain that the British would not return. It refused to do anything to defend the Potomac or to provide a land force to defend Washington, Baltimore and Annapolis. The President, the Secretary of State, and the Secretary of War, were very busy with political strategy and tactics. The nomination for the Presidency and the financial, political and military fortunes of friends, were of more concern than the successful prosecution of the war and the safety of the country; and to silence the people and troublesome critics it was easier and more agreeable to accuse them of sedition and to abuse and scare, and possibly arrest and impris-

on them without trial, than to gather, equip and train troops and give the thought and energy necessary to co-ordinate in the management of the war.

The danger to the capital was imminent. But in the language of Wilkinson, used in his Memoirs and quoted by Williams (the most intelligent and judicious of all that wrote books on the War of 1812), the administration acted, or, more correctly stated, refused to act, and continued to speculate, as if the war were, as the then Secretary of War went on record, "at a thousand miles distance." If any one knew of the state of defense of the capital at that time, it was Williams, and he says:

"Throughout the whole boundary-line of the District of Columbia there was not a single point fortified; not a redoubt, dike or ditch; not a solitary piece of artillery; not a single battalion of regular soldiers; not one company of militia or volunteers properly armed, equipped, and disciplined."

Early in March, 1814, the British, as anticipated, returned to the Chesapeake in some force and renewed their depredations. The British had five vessels of war, which were reinforced from time to time. Their force was so superior to the American flotilla, commanded by the able and brave Commodore Barney, and bottled up in St. Leonard's Creek, that the national administration ordered its destruction; but just in time to save it, a plan of Colonel Wadsworth, head of the ordnance department, was put into successful exe-

cution, and with the aid of two 18-pounders on land, the flotilla forced the British to fall down the river and this permitted Barney to proceed up to Benedict. And Wadsworth, instead of gaining merited credit, was actually discredited! Partisan politics were weightier than military merit.

However, nothing was done to provide defenses for the national capital, or Baltimore, or Annapolis. Apparently to every intelligent person except the President, his Cabinet, and satellites, it was plain that the British would attack points in the Chesapeake territory with strong forces. As early as April 6, 1814, it was known in this country that events in Europe would permit Great Britain to send to our shores her veteran armies from Spain and France. The entrance of the allied armies into Paris March 30th and the accession of Louis XVIII, were published in the Washington papers May 18th. Yet the national administration continued to slumber; and with stubborn refusal to see what was obvious to many, actually repelled the aid that the patriotic people of the District were anxious to give. The truth of the foregoing is nicely shown by the treatment of Alexandria, which will be recounted in a future volume on "The Birth of the Star Spangled Banner."

General Armstrong and others sought, after the War, to excuse the national administration by saying that it had no **official** information of the pacification of Europe until the 26th of June. Such an excuse is,

of course, worse than silence, for it is only evidence of culpability. Of course if General Armstrong had found robbers breaking into his house he would not have done anything whatever until the robbers had sent him in writing, properly sealed, official information that they had robbed his neighbor.

One may get a good idea of the strange notions entertained in the year 1814 in Washington—and not dissimilar from the notions entertained there at more recent dates—by considering the following from the Memoirs of General Wilkinson, who had been a soldier all his adult life, had been given the highest position in the army, had been governor of Louisiana, and, while he cordially hated Madison, yet held such pacific notions as these:

"If such doctrines"—which Wilkinson had just quoted with approval—"apply to the local and political circumstances of Great Britain, how much more applicable are they to those of this country; the former within arm's length of a great, powerful, and rival nation, called her natural enemy, the latter three thousand miles removed* from every rival power; but because the neighboring despots of Europe, whose estates join, and are ever engaged in controversies, find it political in time of peace to prepare for war, by building up today what was knocked down yesterday, or in this year to supply the place of mercenaries

*In Wilkinson's mind war was sure to be "three thousand miles away."

whose throats have been cut the last, we, blindly and falsely, apply the same reason to our situation .... No! although a soldier from early youth, and holding every honorable military man as a brother, I contend it were better the United States should run the hazard of suffering a year or two, in the commencement of every war, if wars they must have, until they can give form, consistency, and experience to their levies, than that they should permit institutions, which ever have been, and will ever continue to be, dangerous to civil liberty."

And that was written **after** the War of 1812!

The baleful, dangerous "institutions" referred to were "an invalid corps, ostensibly to provide for military unfortunates;" "three military academies;" "to increase the standing army;" and "to saddle the people with a national university, on a site so insalubrious, that the great public functionaries find it necessary annually to abandon their public duties three months out of twelve. A national university at the city of Washington within the purlieus of the court!" The quotations are from Wilkinson's Memoirs.

At last, but not until 1814! the President became suspicious that Great Britain was not maintaining such a military force in the Chesapeake simply to steal tobacco, poultry and hogs, and to terrorize the people —to make, as was freely said, by terrorizing methods the war as unpopular as possible among the outraged people. The British did not yet know the Americans:

Havre de Grace, Frenchtown, Georgetown, Fredericktown, Hampton—all this, instead of making the people disposed to yield to the British, made them only the more disposed to fight. Only the national administration had remained undisturbed. There is good evidence that after the British outrages of 1813 on the Chesapeake, a thousand citizens of Washington and Georgetown formed a legion of volunteers, and in due form "petitioned" the President to organize them. He graciously authorized the choice of officers; "but when the names were sent in he refused to commission them, for what reason remains a secret; and thus President Madison prevented the establishment of a corps, which had actually been enrolled, officered, equipped, and, except the rifle companies, completely armed." It was, therefore, quite a reversal of previous position when on June 30th, 1814, President Madison sent to the members of his cabinet a note requesting them to meet him at the White House at noon the next day "to consult them on the measures which it would be proper to adopt for the safety of this city and district."

But note the date, June 30th, 1814! Fifteen months after the British had begun to occupy the waters and the land of the immediate vicinity! Just three months after the allied armies had entered Paris! Six weeks after it was known in Washington that Great Britain had a free hand in her war with the United States!

6.

A CABINET MEETING.

As for what occurred at the consultation of the President with his Cabinet July 1, 1814, we must go to the reports made of that meeting by the members of the Cabinet that attended it, in their letters to the committee of congress appointed to inquire into the causes of the capture of Washington.

In his letter to the committee named, Mr. Monroe, Secretary of State, said that "the President convened the heads of department and the attorney-general to consult them on the measures which it would be proper to adopt for the safety of this city (Washington) and district. He appeared to have digested a plan of the force to be called immediately into the field; the additional force to be kept under orders to march at a moment's notice; its composition, and necessary equipment. It seemed to be his object that some position should be taken between the Eastern Branch and the Patuxent with two or three thousand men, and that an additional force of ten or twelve thousand, includ-

ing the militia of the District, should be in readiness in the neighboring states to march when called on; the whole force to be put under the command of an officer of the regular army. The measures suggested by the President were approved by all the members of the administration."

The Secretary of the Navy, Mr. Jones, wrote that "the President stated the object of the meeting to be consideration of the menacing aspect of things, in consequence of the augmented power of the enemy by the great political changes which had taken place in Europe, and the disposition manifested by the government and people of Great Britain to prosecute the war with the most vindictive and devastating spirit; represented the motives and inducements which he conceived the enemy had to prefer the invasion of the capital rather than any other immediate enterprise; and urged the necessity of speedy and efficient preparation for the defense of the District and capital; inquired into the existing state of its military and naval defenses, and the extent of the disposable force which it would be practicable to concentrate in the District. The Secretary of War estimated the disposable regular force applicable to the intended purpose, to the best of my recollection, at about twelve hundred, including about two hundred cavalry at Carlisle, Pennsylvania, who, I think he said, were not all mounted, but would probably be so in a short time. The Secretary of the Navy enumerated the naval force within immediate reach as

follows: The marines at headquarters, about 120; the force attached to the flotilla under the command of Commodore Barney, on the Patuxent, 500; total 620. To the regular force, the President proposed to add ten thousand militia, to be designated and held in readiness in such neighboring districts as should be found most convenient. He also suggested the propriety of depositing at a suitable place, contiguous to the metropolis, a supply of arms, ammunition and camp equipage. These propositions produced very little discussion. The propriety and expediency of the measures appeared to be admitted, though no formal question was taken, nor was any dissent expressed."

Here we may well stop to note certain facts. First, there was "very little discussion." The probability that the enemy would attack the capital and the certainty that the force to defend it was altogether inadequate, seem to have caused only a languid interest on the part of the gentlemen assembled, and who might be thought to have something to do with the defense of the capital and the conduct of the War.

Second, "no formal question was taken." No definite, positive conclusion **to act** was reached. Mr. Jones continues that "the meeting separated with the understanding that the measures proposed were to be carried into effect." It was only an understanding—not definite, not positive. Apparently the matter was not of sufficient importance to stir the lethargic gentlemen even so far as to think with considerable vigor,

not to speak of something so laborious as reaching a definite conclusion or positive action. By the first of July the weather is hot and oppressive in Washington, and in 1814 the most important employment of cabinet and congress was maneuvering for political advantage.

Third, the force at hand for the defense of the capital—or Baltimore or Annapolis—was only a rather small fraction of what any real knowledge of conditions would have shown to be the least that could prove adequate.

Fourth, the President led the way, not only in stating the danger, but in submitting plans. More of this hereafter.

The Attorney-General, Mr. Rush, wrote: "On the 30th of June, the heads of departments were desired to meet at the President's house on the following day Our public affairs were brought into discussion * * * The President mentioned what I had heard him individually express before relative to Washington, stating his impressions unequivocally to be, that if it fell within the plans of the enemy to send troops for operation upon the Atlantic frontiers this season, he thought the capital would be marked as the most inviting object of a speedy attack; that it would be right forthwith to put in train measures of precaution and defense. He then declared that to him it appeared that a force of ten thousand men should be got in readiness for the city and District; that it would be desirable to have as large a portion of it as practicable regular

troops, but that, at the least, there should be a thousand of this description, and more if more could be obtained. That the residue should be made up of the volunteers and militia of the District of Columbia, combined with that from the parts nearest adjacent of Virginia, Maryland and Pennsylvania. That convenient depots of arms and military equipage should be established. No dissent was expressed to these opinions of the President."

I have reserved the Secretary of War to the last. General Armstrong—the rival of Monroe for the nomination for the Presidency in 1816—wrote: "The questions proposed for discussion were two: 1st. By what means can the seat of government and Baltimore be defended, in case the enemy should make these cities objects of attack? 2nd. Should he select the former, will his approach be made by way of the Potomac or by that of the Patuxent? On these questions I took the liberty of offering the following statements and opinions: 1st. That the principal defense to be relied upon for either place was militia; that, besides artillerists comprising the garrisons of Fort M'Henry and Washington, about one thousand regular troops only could be collected * * * * * that the number of militia called into service should be proportioned to the known or probable strength of the enemy, and be taken from the states of Virginia, Maryland and Pennsylvania; that it is not believed the enemy will hazard a blow at either place with a force less than five thou-

sand men; that, to repel one of this extent, we should at least require double that number of militia." General Armstrong writes at length of the proper naval defense of the Potomac, etc.

It will be observed that General Armstrong's letter, as quoted, indicates that the views expressed and the plans proposed were his, and not the President's. In this he differs from the others.

This would lack the importance to be mentioned were it not that it shows the rivalry and division among the members of the national administration. This rivalry and jealousy was largely responsible for the failure to take proper and effective measures of defense of Washington; it was largely responsible for the failures of the War and the feebleness of its prosecution; it was largely responsible for a good many wounds and a good many deaths among our brave soldiers.

There are three against Armstrong alone: the chances are three to one that the plans were those of the President. The probabilities are yet greater, for, as Williams said, "Mr. Madison made no pretensions to military science." Major Williams thought that because of this the President had consulted some military friend and had derived the plans from him. Major Williams conjectured that this friend was Colonel Monroe. A conclusion opposite to that reached by Williams is the more reasonable. History shows that it is the public man who knows the least about mili-

tary science or strategy that is often the most ready to formulate military plans and advocate military campaigns. There is, however, more than a possibility that the plans proposed by President Madison were derived from his Secretary of War. The Secretary of War and the Secretary of State being rivals for the next nomination for the Presidency, they were naturally antagonistic to each other in more ways than one, they were envious and jealous of each other, and both were continually trying to become more popular, to advocate those things and to do those things that would please the populace. The opinions expressed by their contemporaries are so conflicting that one can only conjecture the feeling the President had for Monroe and Armstrong. It is the most probable that President Madison sincerely admired and liked his Secretary of State while fearing, yet not having the highest respect for, his Secretary of War. It is certain, however, that he frequently consulted his Secretary of War—but rarely heeded his recommendations. If the President had obtained the plans for the defense of Washington from Armstrong or if the plans were advanced by Armstrong, Monroe and the Secretary of the Navy and the Attorney-General would have preferred to give the credit to Madison, and it is certain that for these plans and everything else they would give as little credit as they well could to the Secretary of War.

It is to be considered further that the letters to

the committee of congress were written after the destruction of the capital, when every one was trying to put the blame and humiliation on some one else, and when nearly every one else of the national administration was trying to put the blame on the Secretary of War. Monroe, Jones and Rush would be exceedingly loath to write that July 1st the Secretary of War had proposed plans for the defense of Washington.

The sympathies of the writer are almost sure to be with the loser. He has not been able to escape the conclusion that some injustice was done Armstrong when the destruction of Washington was used to discredit and almost disgrace him and certainly to put the Presidency forever far from him. Yet it was said that if it was easy to make the people believe that he had not advanced plans for the defense of Washington July 1st, or even later, or that it was easy to make him unpopular, his conduct, and especially his manners, were to blame. He was "cold and repulsive." "His peculiar temper and turn of mind were supposed to be entirely uncongenial with the official and confidential relations in which he must necessarily stand with the President." His appointment to the War Department occasioned much surprise. For various reasons, after the resignation of Mr. Eustis as Secretary of War, the President found it really difficult to get any one acceptable to him to take the place. Several prominent and able men, offered the place, declined it. At this junc-

ure General Armstrong was recommended to the President by friends in whose judgment Mr. Madison had confidence. The President had good reason to believe that General Armstrong had the ability and the military knowledge and experience to fill the place satisfactorily. Unfortunately he did not know of the peculiar temper and disagreeable manners of General Armstrong or else he chose to ignore them. The senate did not ignore them and General Armstrong was confirmed by a bare majority. It was almost, or quite, a tragedy that time developed that the freakish temper and natural stubborness of General Armstrong made him disposed to oppose what others advocated, to deride what others advanced, and to adhere to his opinions when it was all too plain to others that those opinions were wrong.

It is not strange, therefore, that it was possible to make General Armstrong as well as the militia—who were only common people—the scapegoats after the destruction of the capital; as it was only to be expected that General Armstrong would maintain longer than any one else that the British did not intend to attack Washington, and delayed until too late any effective measures for the defense of the capital.

The attitude of the Secretary of War is doubtless correctly set forth in what follows from General Wilkinson's "Memoirs":

"It appears from the best information I have been

able to obtain, that towards the end of June, 1814, President Madison had conceived the idea that the enemy might make the capital an object of attack, and that advices received from Messrs. Bayard and Gallatin the 26th of the month, confirmed his suspicions; in consequence of which, he on the 1st of July, submitted to his Cabinet a plan for immediately calling 2,000 or 3,000 men into the field, and holding ten or twelve thousand militia and volunteers, of the neighboring states, in readiness to reinforce that corps. It seems also that he suggested the plan of taking a position, somewhere between the Eastern Branch and the Patuxent, and that this proposition was not objected to * * * * * there are abundant existing evidences, of applications made to the executive by individuals and by corporate bodies, as well posterior as anterior to this convention of the Cabinet, on the subject, of the defense of the city, to which no satisfactory answer could be obtained. I understand that to the earnest inquiries of two gentlemen, of the first intelligence, respectability, and fortune in the District, after listening to the expression of their apprehensions, the Secretary of War laconically replied, 'I don't believe there is any danger.' "

Before we dismiss the meeting of the President's cabinet July 1, 1814, we should consider that with the exception of Monroe, the members of that Cabinet were not men of the first rank in ability or force

of character. Naturally Monroe would not favor the prominence of a cabinet position to any one that might gain troublesome popularity. But doubtless he found no need of argument with Madison to have maintained a cabinet that could not, in any place, become dangerous. Madison, though one of the very greatest men in the history of this nation, was not great throughout his character. He lacked that greatness, the breadth and perfection of greatness, seen in Washington and Lincoln, that chose, for the furtherance and security of a great cause, the intimate service of the ablest, most forceful contemporaries, though they might have been—and yet were—rivals and critics. Madison preferred for cabinet ministers those that would seek instructions and heed suggestions, rather than men that would think and act with ability and force for themselves. The members of his cabinet present at the notable meeting July 1, 1814, should not be harshly criticised because they did not discuss the plan submitted for the defense of Washington or because they accepted that plan by implication: that the plan was suggested by the President or was approved by him, was all that they cared to know—and that was just the attitude the President desired. It was unfortunate for his country that Madison did not feel the need of the counsel and activities of the very ablest and most forceful of his fellow citizens, regardless of political party or personal feeling, for the United States was at

war with its overmatch. Only the very greatest feel the need, and are ready to acknowledge the need, of the very best help they can get when great issues are put to the decision of war—as when a Lincoln joins with him such men as Seward, Chase and Stanton.

7.

CERTAIN CONDITIONS CONSIDERED.

We will all certainly agree with Cicero and others that the historian must write down much more than the events. Justice to the dead that participated in the events written about and especially justice to the readers of what is written, demand that the writer give such information beyond the mere recital of facts as will enable the reader to judge people and events correctly. Hence the reader must know of the public opinions and morals, of the material and spiritual condition of the people, and of the inherited and inevitably acquired characteristics of the persons of prominence.

On the shoulders of President Madison must be laid so very much of the responsibility for the course of the War—he had a subservient congress as well as cabinet—that, while it may be tiresome to the reader, it is nevertheless well to call attention again to his peaceful disposition, for it was his repugnance to war that was responsible for his all but fatal procrastina-

tion in the conduct of the War. "President Madison would neither act himself nor allow others to act," wrote Wilkinson.

Wilkinson was frankly unfriendly to President Madison, and this must be considered; nevertheless, his assertion just quoted contained a good deal of truth.

In an effort to shield and excuse Madison and Monroe—and Armstrong—it has been said that the first information they had of the fall of Bonaparte and as a result the release of Wellington's Peninsular veterans for service in America, was June 26, 1814. As already pointed out, this is not true. It was on June 26 that the President received certain official information from our ministers, Gallatin and Bayard. But the President and the country knew in April that the allies fighting against Bonaparte were everywhere gaining ground and that the end was not far off. On the 3rd of April, Mr. Calhoun, Chairman of the Committee of Foreign Relations of the House, introduced a bill to repeal the Embargo Act and made a notable and eloquent address in support of this bill, in which his principal argument was founded on the complete change that had just occurred in the circumstances of the European belligerents. On April 6th Bonaparte abdicated. It will be seen that the astute Calhoun had correctly interpreted the news he had received—and in those days six weeks might be required for news to get from France to Washington. On the 12th of

May the brig Ida, from Rochelle, arrived at Boston, and brought information of the entrance of the allied armies into Paris March 31st, and also of proclamations issued in the name of Louis XVIII. Three days later the cartel Fair American, from Liverpool, reached Sandy Hook, and its passengers had read in the London papers the official account of the abdication of Bonaparte and the virtual end of the war with France in which Britain had participated. The information brought by both the Ida and the Fair American appeared in the Washington papers on May 18th.

Yet ninety days later no effective measures had been taken to defend Washington!

Bonaparte had set the fashion of capturing the capital city of an enemy. Britain was now free to send her seasoned soldiers, natives and mercenaries, to America. British forces had been active on the Chesapeake for more than a year and their conduct at several places, contrary to the usages of civilized warfare, gave ample earnest of what might be their conduct if they reached the national capital. Yet Madison, Monroe—and Armstrong—perceived no danger, found no time for military activity, but remained exceedingly busy about the Presidential nomination to be made in 1816 and about public and political offices. Well might Williams, brigade-major of the Columbian Brigade in the War, write after mature reflection:

"The moral which we are disposed to draw from the history of the battle of Bladensburg is, not that

Americans were too 'pusillanimous' to defend their seat of government, and that, therefore, it would be safer to hire an army of foreign mercenaries to defend it for us; nor that militia troops are not to be depended upon, and therefore a large standing army of regular troops is necessary; but that politicians of fairest fame require watching, and will not hesitate to sacrifice or jeopardize the interests and honor of their country in order to advance themselves or ruin a rival."

Yet if one were to apply that without qualification to Madison or Monroe or Armstrong he would do every one of them a great injustice. We must be careful to understand the conditions, opinions and standards of 1814 in the United States. For fifty years, and especially during the years following the Revolution, there had been much profound, fine and eloquent speech-making and writing about the science and practice of government, in which the loftiest sentiments were expressed and the strictest standards of conduct of public officials were set forth. The spoken and printed word were of the purest patriotism, the strictest honesty, the most virtuous conduct. The thought and expression about government and the duties and conduct of public officials reached commonly a plane that had rarely been attained before and has as rarely been attained since. But between preachment and practice there was a wide and deep chasm. To steal money directly and boldly from the national treasury was an unthinkable crime; but to rob the peo-

ple obliquely or to sacrifice the public interests was more than excusable when the motive was partisan political advantage. There were two schools that taught very differently about the safe and proper functions of government; nearly all connected with these schools thought that the success of the other school would be the destruction of the nation; each school was organized as a political party; hence to defeat the other party and secure the success of one's own was the purest and most practical patriotism. Partisan feeling ran high, partisan contests were bitter, and from this grew personal animosities that made invincibly strong the conviction that when the triumph of a party and its candidates was the end, it justified any means.

It is doubtful if truer patriots ever lived than Madison and Monroe. It is not easy, and it would probably be unjust, to question the patriotism of Armstrong. All served their country well at times, though some, at least, did not serve their country well at all times. But it is only right and fair, if one presumes to sit in judgment on any man, to consider all the conditions —material, intellectual and moral—of his time. When we consider these conditions as they existed during the lives of Armstrong, Monroe and Madison, we will not have much censure for the first, and the faults of character and conduct of the others will be hid in the dazzling brilliancy and steady light of their great and patriotic services to the weak and struggling Republic.

As the greatest responsibility rested on the President, on him might fall the greatest blame. Therefore we should keep in mind that which the author will risk repeating once more—Madison was a man reluctant to engage in war and preferred the pen far above the sword. This would have been commendable if the outrages of our enemies on our commerce and seamen had been confined to the work of the pen only. Madison's preference for the pen and his belief in his diplomatic ability were responsible for his giving credence to the reports that were brought to America in the early summer of 1814 that Britain would seek peace during the summer. While making preparations to send Wellington's Peninsular veterans to Canada—to be so unkindly treated at Plattsburg!—and to the Chesapeake and later to Louisiana, Great Britain, knowing Madison well, was careful to lull him yet more securely into the certainty of safety by giving grounds for rumors of negotiations for peace. Madison was easily deceived. He even regarded the mediation of Russia as promising. Madison evidently believed that with the pen he could make the English people ashamed of the way the English forces were making war, and thus make them so opposed to the War as to influence their government. Doubtless Monroe did not approve of this, for he knew the class that ruled in Great Britain; but he was unable to get Madison to act, if he really attempted to do so. There is little evidence that Monroe was more alarmed than

Madison about the safety of the national capital. True, it was very often said that the War was "Monroe's war." If he had been President the War would have been differently conducted—he would have sought victory on the field of battle; his weapons would not have been made of paper. But the man that was President delayed and procrastinated in the making of war because he believed that he could do the impossible with the diplomatic pen.

The conditions responsible for, and made by, the military methods of the British must be considered if we would have a correct or proper understanding of the events leading up to "The Invasion of the City of Washington." Undoubtedly some of the British forces at times ignored the laws of civilized warfare—even for that time. But what war of any magnitude has been so conducted that the same charge could not justly be brought against some of the contending forces? And plainly while they are at peace men are not always just and moral. While engaged in peaceful pursuits all men do not always live the Golden Rule. Those that have so much to say about the evils and abuses of war have nothing to say about the evils and abuses of peace. The evils and abuses of war are much the more obtrusive for we are accustomed to peace. The evils of peace are real and great, and yet more insidious, and not infrequently clothed as benefits. However, we will grant, what is true, that war is—no one knew better what it is than Napoleon Bo-

naparte, and he said, "What is war? A trade of barbarians."* War can not be made a pink tea affair. And pink teas do not develop strong characters or peoples or produce good moral fibre. While the excesses of the British troops along the Chesapeake justly merited the execrations of the American people, to condemn all because of the acts of a few is illogical and unjust. We must consider the general practices of the British troops along the Chesapeake. Of those practices, the one most complained of was the taking or destruction of private property. But if that is to condemn an army, the British have not been the only troops within the borders of the United States that must suffer condemnation. Further, the appropriation and destruction of private property by the British were doubtless much exaggerated. The victims rarely start these things too small and the recitals rarely shrink during their travels.

The most charming writer about the Chesapeake expedition—and a very fair and just one—is the British "Subaltern in America." His narrative is direct and frank, his style simple and lucid. As a matter of course, without any attempt to justify or excuse, he narrates that from the time the British troops landed they foraged and pillaged. What they could not consume they frequently destroyed. They took everything they wanted that they could find, and they especially wanted everything to drink and eat. True, there

*Count de Segur's Campaign in Russia, Book VII, Chap. 8.

were "orders already issued against plunder and rapine." But, observes this subaltern, "it would have been unreasonable to expect that hungry soldiers, in an enemy's country, would sit down to digest their hunger, whilst flocks of poultry and herds of swine were within their reach." Consider that the voyage from England had begun in an exceedingly severe storm lasting for days, yet later the ships were becalmed—the voyage was of weeks; some of the casks of water became poisonous, some of the sea biscuit spoiled; some of the poultry the officers had provided for their use was washed overboard, and the pigs died: how toothsome indeed must have been the fat fowls and swine of the enemy! Fowls and swine have often been the undoing of a hungry trooper.

But the indignation because of the taking of fowls and swine was not near so great as the indignation because of the taking of slaves. The negroes were more valuable. The Norfolk Herald was of opinion that "To take negroes, who were human beings; to tear them forever from their kindred and connections is what we should never expect from a Christian nation, especially one that has done so much toward abolishing the slave trade. There are negroes in Virginia and, we believe, in all the Southern states, who have their interests and affections as strongly engrafted in their hearts, as the whites, and who feel the sacred ties of filial, parental, and conjugal affection, equally

strong, and who are warmly attached to their owners and the scenes of their nativity."

Commenting on this, that most interesting Canadian historian of the War of 1812, Auchinleck*, says:

"James very correctly notices this as one of the most inadvertent but happiest pieces of satire extant; and so it must appear to all. Even at the present time, no later than two days back, a New Orleans journal, the 'Creole,' contained an advertisement offering to purchase slaves from any quarter, and it is impossible to take up a southern paper without the eye being offended and the senses disgusted with the accounts of slave sales—the attractions of a young quadroon being dwelt on and puffed with as much minuteness as the points of a horse. The revelations of the horrors of American slavery are so patent, and have excited such universal horror, that it is almost unnecessary to dwell on the unparallelled impudence which could assert that the slaves were warmly attached to their masters—slave owners selling their children, and the mothers of their children; but the bare thought of these things is sickening, yet the very journals containing those advertisements were the foremost to accuse the British of having violated 'the dictates of Christianity and civilization' * * * * During the whole period that the English fleet were on the waters of the Chesapeake, the officers, who were sent on

*See The Battle of Plattsburg.

shore to procure provisions and water, were constantly beset by crowds of fugitive slaves, who implored to be rescued from a state of bondage. These appeals were too piteous, always to be disregarded, and the consequence was that hundreds of them were taken on board the British vessels, from whence they were mostly transported to Halifax, a few being landed at Jamaica. This circumstance it was that afforded an excuse for the assertion of the American Government, that 'the British, after receiving the negroes, shipped the wretches to the West Indies, where they were sold as slaves, for the benefit of British officers' * * * * The assertion that slaves were dragged away by force with the greatest cruelty is simply absurd; it was with the greatest difficulty that the British commander could victual his fleet, lying as it did on an enemy's shore, and it was not very probable that he would suffer his difficulties in that respect to be increased by the addition of loads of negroes, whom, to make profit on it, it would be necessary to feed and keep in good condition. The only marvel is that the British commander should have allowed his feelings of humanity to overstep the strict line of duty, inasmuch as by rescuing these unhappy victims from slavery he was seriously inconveniencing the crews of the vessels under his command, and so crowding his ships as to render them almost unfit for going into action."

It is to be hoped that the amiable reader has read carefully what has just been said about the depreda-

tions of the British on the shores of the Chesapeake, and that as he has read carefully he has also considered carefully, and honestly and justly. It might not be amiss for him to re-read what is said on the subject just named, especially the extract from the edifying history of that consistent lover of "the glorious British constitution"—Auchinleck.

For with this careful reading, and careful, and especially honest and just, consideration, there will surely come a conviction that most questions are possessed of two sides, if not three; and there will surely arise also a tolerant feeling that is needed by every one that reads history, a fortiori the history of war. We may have, and should have, some little feeling of kindness toward even our enemies in war—unless, as has rather rarely happened, they have so outraged the laws of humanity and raped the decencies of mortal combat, that they have put themselves beyond the pale of those to be regarded as human beings; and even then we should be very careful to outlaw only those directly guilty and those that have approved the guilty. Most assuredly we may have, and we should have, no small measure of charity for our own, for their sins of delay or omission, whether they be civilians or soldiers. We may be sure that we know of only the very small part of the obstacles in their way. It is easy to blame a commander for a defeat—and the chances are many to one that no man could have avoided the defeat. It is easy to scold at troops be-

cause they retreated when they saw some of their number being killed or wounded—but would we have stood in the ranks as long? Our two greatest men—so great that they stand aloof, like two giant trees on the top of a high hill—Washington and Lincoln, were objects of more criticism, of more impatience, of more abuse, of more scheming enmity, than any other two of our Presidents; and how petty and immaterial are now all their faults and errors that at the time seemed so big and criminal to some honest people! It is the duty of the historian to point out the faults of Madison and the others responsible for "The Invasion of the City of Washington;" but considering all the conditions, of which not the least important was the character of the American people themselves—their ideas, their jealousies, their lack of cohesion, their little loyalty to the national government—who could have done much better? And if we are disposed to be impatient with a later President, if we see that his administration has a good many of the faults of the Madison administration, let us be careful indeed that we are impatient and that we point out faults, only so far as is justified, and with the one clear purpose, to aid the administration to greater efficiency. When war was declared June 18, 1812, there was but one thing for every American citizen to do, regardless of his opinions of war in general or of the war with Great Britain in particular—do his utmost for victory. How plainly do we see that now! May not a like clear vision

be his that, in 2018, looks back a century? And he will see clearly also that it was the part of true patriotism to expose faults and corruption—for that is essential to victory; and also to give credit generously for the many things done—for that is equally essential to victory.

At the time, the people of the United States were indeed indignant that their national capital had been wantonly devastated; and this act of the British was almost universally condemned. Even among the British people, and especially among the British common people, there were many indeed that felt that the British, not the Americans, had been disgraced. Yet one must marvel, not that the British burned the national capitol and other buildings, but that the Americans permitted it. Notwithstanding the opinion of Bonaparte*, Jomini could speak as an authority on some phases of war; and he said—

"The English performed an enterprise which may be ranged amongst the most extraordinary:—that against the capital of the United States of America. To the great astonishment of the world, a handful of seven or eight thousand English were seen to descend

*The Count de Segur, in his History of the Expedition to Russia, book IV, Chap. 5, says that in the course of a conversation with an envoy from the Czar, Bonaparte said: "You all believe yourselves to understand the art of war because you have read Jomini; but if his book could have taught you anything, do you think that I would have allowed it to be published?" This was at the beginning of the invasion of Russia.

in the midst of a state of ten millions of souls, penetrate a considerable distance, besiege the capital, and destroy the public establishments there; results which history may be searched in vain for another example of."*

Here the American citizen may well stop to do some hard thinking; starting with the quotation from Jomini, and assisted by much that has preceded.

---

*Summary of the Art of War.

8.

A PAPER ARMY.

It is not the task of the author of this little book to make any defense of General Wilkinson; and without a defense many will consider Wilkinson exceedingly untrustworthy about anything. I can only say that Wilkinson was one of those on whom was visited grave injustice in a time of bitter feeling and partisan rancor hard to understand at this time. He was guilty of a good many things he should not have done. He may have been guilty of treason. Grant even that, and it remains true that in his statements about conditions before the burning of the capitol, the measures that were taken and those that were not taken for defense, and the disposition and handling of the forces, he is intelligent and enlightening and nearly always correct and accurate. His prejudice is so open that it is easily perceived, and I have paid no attention to it. The reader will not be wearied with his minute and laborious explanations of how he would have successfully defended the capital, although some space must

be given to this later on—more than one general without a command has had better hindsight than foresight. However, it must be said that he has proved by witnesses of the highest character that as early as July 1st, 1814, he foresaw that the British would attack Washington and had elaborated plans for its defense. Further, although he was under arrest when he went to Washington in late June, he asked to be allowed to serve in the military forces when danger threatened. Yet, further, as will appear later, in August even Monroe did not scorn to seek his advice. His military attainments, experience and knowledge were such that few, indeed, could be more capable of stating a military situation and therefore the following is quoted from his Memoirs:

"It appears, that the day after the cabinet council, the 2nd of July, the President judged it expedient to create a 10th military district * * * * * A district was accordingly created to comprehend the whole state of Maryland, the District of Columbia, and that part of Virginia north of the Rappahannock river, embracing an exposed coast of 800 to 1,000 miles, vulnerable at every point, and intersected by many large rivers, and by Chesapeake Bay * * * * * * General Winder accepted the command without means and without time to create them; he found the district without magazines of provisions or forage, without transport tools or implements, without a commissa-

riat or efficient quartermaster's department, without a general staff, and finally without troops."

Why was this 10th military district created? There is little doubt that its creation was the result of bringing partisan political maneuvering and wire-pulling into military operations. Until the creation of this new military district, Washington was in the 5th military district, and this 5th district "was then commanded by one of the bravest and most experienced generals in the service, Moses Porter, who had entered the Revolutionary army as a common soldier, and had gradually raised himself, by his own signal merits, from a private in the ranks to the high and distinguished post of brigadier general and commander of a military district* * * * * The Secretary of War, it appears, was desirous of calling this veteran to the seat of government, for the purpose of defense, but his wishes were over-ruled * * * * Another general could not be appointed to an independent command within District No. 5 without a gross insult to General Porter; and as the President had already determined to have another, and had, indeed, 'specially assigned' him to the service, a commendable respect for his old fellow-soldier of the Revolution may have induced the Secretary of War to save his feelings by suggesting the establishment of a new district * * * * *After having created military district No. 10 * * * * * the next subject of discussion, we may suppose, was the selection of a military commander for the new district

—though it might be inferred from the language of General Armstrong that this had been pre-determined by the President himself: so, at least, if we are to credit the statement of the other members of the cabinet * * * * * It was a point of even more importance than the selection of troops, whether regard be had to the quality or number of the latter. A commander of well known and acknowledged experience and good fortune—for sometimes success is as much the result of the latter, in the eyes of the soldiers, as of skill or courage—would have brought with him to the execution of his duties what the French call a **prestige,** a prepossession in his favor, which would have inspired the troops with a confidence perhaps sufficient to counterbalance all the deficiencies in their organization. They would have obeyed the orders of such a leader with a trustful conviction that whatever he commanded was right and necessary. They would have fought under him with the animating presentiment of victory; and all who are acquainted with human nature are aware that the stimulus of such an anticipation rarely fails to bring about its own realization * * * * If there had been no mutual jealousies between the two Revolutionary secretaries,* it is not probable that any objection would have been made to the selection by the head of the War Department of General Porter to command the force destined for the

---

*Monroe and Armstrong.

defense of the seat of government; for that the objection originated, either directly or indirectly, with the Secretary of State, was never doubted by any intelligent citizen of Washington at the period referred to; and it is as little to be doubted that the principal ground of the objection was that the Secretary of War recommended the appointment."

This last quotation is from Williams' volume on the "Capture of Washington." He certainly was in as good position to know about the topics just discussed as any one except Monroe and Armstrong, and he never hesitated to write the truth as he saw it. He hints that another reason for the creation of the 10th district and thus putting Washington and the surrounding territory outside the command of General Porter, was the wish of the Secretary of State, "regarded as a prominent candidate for the presidential succession," to execute a brilliant military achievement which would "render his future elevation sure," but which "could not well be attempted under the bluff old soldier, Moses Porter, or any other experienced general not indebted to him for appointment."

This much space has been given to this matter, and yet more will be again, because it is a matter of much importance—of vital importance. Political ambition is all too prone to intrude itself into military operations. Far too often in our history there have been "political generals" who may have been patriotic, but certainly were so incompetent that treason could

have been but little more disastrous. It may be safely said that the fewer politicians and methods of the politician in the conduct of war, the better for the soldiers and the country. Whenever military promotion is used in any way to build up a political following to secure public office, a crime of no light hue is committed against the people. Even the indirect methods of the politicians in the War and Navy departments are to be heartily condemned. The creation of District No. 10, as just recounted, indirectly, by the favorite hidden methods of the politicians, to displace one commander and place another, may not have been responsible for the disgrace and humiliation of the destruction of the national capital, but the ideas and methods responsible for this shifting of commanders were responsible for that disgrace and humiliation. The reader knows only too well that the War of 1812 is not the only war in which the United States has engaged in which lives have been sacrificed, defeats suffered instead of victories won, and the burden of war laid heavier on all the people, because the politician was allowed to have his way in places—where he should not have been allowed to intrude.

As set forth in a previous chapter, there was, for the selection of the commander of the new district, a politician's reason, other than to have a commanding general under direct obligation to the Secretary of State and willing to stand aside that all the rays of glory might shine on that Secretary.

General W. H. Winder was, as Ingersoll* states in his historical sketch of the War of 1812, a relative of Levin Winder, the governor of Maryland, federal governor of a federal state; "and Mr. Madison and Mr. Monroe deemed it politic to conciliate opposition by appointing him to that responsible and arduous command."

The view of the soldier, as expressed by Williams, was that "the most effectual mode of mitigating the opposition to the War would have been to render the War successful and glorious; and that would have been accomplished by selecting able men for the conduct of military operations, without reference to their personal relations or party opinions, by encouraging capacity, no matter from what rank or class of life it sprung, and giving it the means of displaying itself in a way which should advance the public interests."

The author must confess that he agrees with Major Williams on this point, at least.

General Armstrong states further that "the person recommended by the Secretary of War for this appointment was Brigadier-General Moses Porter, then at Norfolk, whose whole life may be said to have been military. Entering the army of the Revolution a boy, he had, by uniform good conduct, risen through every rank, from that of a private to the com-

---

*See The Battle of Plattsburg.

mand of a brigade. No objection to General Winder, except a want of military experience, either was or could be made; his patriotism and courage had already been tested, and were generally acknowledged."

General Winder was not without military training or experience, but in neither was he near to Porter, or other available generals.

Such was the new commander of the new military district. Not his military experience or attainments, but the expediency of politicians, was responsible for his selection. He did not lack ability; he did not altogether lack military training; he certainly did not lack energy or patriotism; but he was unknown to the troops that were to serve under him; even had they known him they would have lacked that confidence in their commander that is so important to victory; and considering what was needed for his success and what was lacking, he was given what to him—or to any man living—was an impossible task. The fault was not in Winder or in the soldiers he commanded. It was in the national administration.

To repeat the sententious statement of General Wilkinson, "General Winder accepted the command without means and without time to create them; he found the district without magazines or provisions or forage, without transport tools or implements, without a commissariat or efficient quartermaster's department, without a general staff, and finally without troops." But truly magnificent preparations were

made—on paper—to furnish him with everything needed. That was always the way with the national administration. There never was a regime that could more easily call armies from the farm and forge by requisition—and get no troops. There never was an administration more valiant with proclamation. One shrinks from considering what would have happened if there had been typewriters! The writer knows well of a small city that at least once a month has a public meeting addressed by its most prominent citizens—tight-fisted old fogies; at which meeting certain committees are appointed, numerously enough to put the name of nearly every one present in the next morning's paper; which committees report copiously of whereases and resolutions which, after every one present who thinks he is an orator has painfully demonstrated that he is not, are adopted—and then all go home to read, the next morning, the usual congratulations of the Press on having done something—something important. And always when I read of the conduct of the War by the Madison administration I am reminded of that little city on the river bank each year growing less in business and educational importance, but more fruitful in meetings, speeches and wordy resolutions.

On the Fourth of July, 1814, the President made a requisition on the various states for 93,500 militia! It was just as easy to make a requisition for 93,500 as for 9,350. Inevitably Madison called for the 93,500. Cer-

tain soi-disant historians have taken account of the different "calls" and "requisitions" of the national administration for troops, and being contemptuous of the truth and exceedingly brave and broad liars when the truth would not serve their purposes, have allowed their readers to understand, or some have positively asserted, that the numbers called for were the numbers obtained. As a matter of fact, all in arms during the War were but a rather small fraction of the number these lying writers of popular or unpopular histories lead their readers, unfortunately mostly school children, to believe were actually in service.

Not all of the 93,500 troops—on paper—were, however, to be for the defense of Washington. The quota to be furnished by each state was designated. Virginia was to furnish 2,000; Pennsylvania 5,000; Maryland 6,000; and the District of Columbia 2,000; a total of 15,000 for the defense of the capital.

But even this diminished number was not to be immediately available—was not to be immediately available even on paper. The President's requisition specified that these militia were "to be organized and equipped, and held in readiness for future service, within their respective states, until the 10th district shall be actually invaded, or menaced with invasion." Then General Winder might "call for a part or for the whole of the quota assigned to the state of Mary-

land,* which shall have been organized and equipped under the aforesaid requisition."

And then General Winder was cautioned not to call for troops until they were clearly needed, being careful "to proportion the call to the exigency." Further, it will be noted that he could call for only, at the most, the Maryland quota of 6,000. Yet further, he could not call for even these until the invasion of his military district was imminent or an accomplished fact. And yet further, he could have only those Maryland militia "which shall have been organized and equipped under this requisition." This meant as many as the governor of Maryland chose to organize and equip, for, as General Wilkinson points out, Winder had no power or authority to organize or equip the militia—nor had the states! Wilkinson is right in saying that "the requisition was a mere matter of form, and incapable of producing the end it affected to embrace; in each state the militia was first to be organized and equipped in the manner prescribed by the requisition, and yet in those states there existed no power so to organize and equip in such form, and until such special organization and equipment had taken place, the call was not to be made." All of this is true. General Winder was not to have militia collected or trained or equipped before he needed them. He was

*Apparently Pennsylvania, Virginia and the District of Columbia had been named in the requisition only that they might not feel slighted.

not to have any militia "trained to military duties in a camp of observation and exercise, to await the expected exigency, around which the remainder might rally; he is, when danger stares him in the face, to the utter neglect of the many important duties pressing on him, obliged to devote his time to the collection and formation of a body of raw yeomanry; and is himself trammelled with restrictions."

But the national administration, busy with partisan political concerns and timorous, weak and vacillating in its prosecution of the War, actually feared that it had gone too far! One can not refrain from quoting again from General Wilkinson:

"President Madison appears to have been alarmed, lest he should have done too much, and in recommending depots of arms and equipments, he seems to have forgotten that subsistence was an indispensable article of the munitions of war; that transport was necessary to convey his baggage; and that entrenching tools and axes might be useful, in breaking up and obstructing roads, or to fortify his camps; and to put it out of General Winder's power to burthen the public with the expense of a competent force for the defense of the capital, he informs him, through his Secretary of War, on the 17th of July, two days after he had received advice of the arrival of Commodore Cochrane's van at Lynnhaven bay with heavy reinforcements, that 'the militia of the District of Columbia, amounting to about 2,000 is kept in a

disposable state, and subject to your orders; I have also to express the wishes of the President, that not less than two, nor more than three thousand of the new drafts, under the requisition of the 4th of July, be organized, embodied and encamped at some middle point between Baltimore and this city.' How inconsistent was the conduct of President Madison! The enemy had been reconnoitering the Potowmack and the Patuxent since the beginning of May; no doubt remained of their designs against the capital, which were admitted by himself, and under the impression, he calls on the respective states for the immediate organization and equipment of their respective quota of 93,500 militia, 15,000 of whom he designated for the defense of the metropolis, but directs them to be held 'in readiness for future service.' This was doing with one hand and undoing with the other; it was blowing hot and cold in the same breath; it followed that General Winder must, necessarily, have been perplexed and embarrassed."

It must be taken into account that General Wilkinson was prejudiced against President Madison; that his feeling toward the President, who had had him arrested, and, when the Memoirs were written, had had him courtmartialed, was bitter. Yet it is true that in the main the criticisms of the President were justified. What Wilkinson criticises is only one of the several highly successful attempts of Madison to create a large paper army—but pitiably small when actu-

ally ready for service. On one point, however, Wilkinson is incorrect—when he states that the President admitted that there was no doubt of the designs of the British on the capital. The President was not sure that the British thought of attacking the capital—apparently he was rarely sure of anything about the War. Incredible as it is, not he or the members of his cabinet were sure that the British intended to attack Washington, as late as the morning of August 24th. This will be shown hereafter. The President found it impossible to decide in his own mind where the British forces would strike; until the very eve of the battle of Bladensburg he was not sure that they intended to strike at all; day after day and week after week he persisted in the happy dream that the British had no greater object than to continue to "live off the country"—a procedure in war not altogether sanctioned by the rules of the game, but made respectable by custom—to "appropriate" tobacco, flour, hogs and poultry, and occasionally to relieve this routine by burning a farm house. It was indeed unfortunate that nothing could disturb the belief of the national administration that the British forces were amiable gentlemen bent on a little prankish and thievish, but friendly, diversion.

That the conditions and circumstances must prove perplexing and embarrassing to General Winder, was beyond doubt. In his Historical Sketch of the Second War of Independence, Ingersoll says:

"Winder's was an arduous perplexity: to arm and fortify a military district without magazines or troops, composed by a cabinet of older soldiers than himself, whom it would be disrespectful in him to contradict, and almost insubordinate to overrule; to lead undisciplined neighbors to battle, in whose material prowess he could not confide, of whose blood he was humanely sparing, overlooked by several superiors, and distracted by a host of advisers."

Another says of the conditions and task that confronted General Winder:

"The appointment of a general, unless a proper military staff is furnished him, and efficient troops given him, is a very unnecessary ceremony. There were few regular troops within the power of the government; the most numerous body which had recently been near or within the district, 500 men of the 10th infantry, under Lieutenant-Colonel Clinch, a body of stout, active young men enlisted in North Carolina, which had been encamped near Washington for several weeks, were marched away to the northern frontiers on the 13th of June, in the midst of the alarm of an expected attack. In strictness, two detachments of the 36th and 38th infantry, and a small detachment of artillery, amounting in the whole to 330 men, were all that could be said to be at disposal at the time that the 10th military district was created, nor was this great deficiency remedied in any degree before the troops were called into action. No orders were issued by the

War Department appointing an assistant adjutant-general, assistant inspector-general, or assigning to duty in the district any topographical engineers; and it is well known that General Winder's greatest complaint was, that he had not the aid of this staff, without which the proper organization, equipment, and efficiency of troops is impossible and that his time was occupied by an oppressive mass of detail, when he should have been at liberty to devote it to duties of a very different character."

The recital, later on, of the many activities, the travel, the hurry, of General Winder, will emphasize the closing sentence of the paragraph just quoted.

General Winder received his commission as commander of the new 10th district on the 6th of July. Three days later he addressed a letter to "Hon. John Armstrong, Secretary of War," in which he said:

"The utmost regular force which it is probable can, in the present state of affairs, be placed at my command, including the force necessary for garrisoning the several forts, will not exceed 1,000 men, and some weeks will necessarily elapse before the detachments from Virginia and Carlisle will reach my district. The detachments of the 36th and 38th are, therefore, the only troops that I can expect to have in the meantime, and when those other detachments join, the utmost force will be from 700 to 800 * * * * The enemy's fleet has now spent more than a twelvemonth in the waters of the Chesapeake, and during that time

has visited almost every river falling into the Bay, and must be presumed to have such accurate information that whatever expedition may be destined to these waters will have a definite object, to the execution of which, on its arrival, it will proceed with the utmost promptitude and dispatch. Should Washington, Baltimore or Annapolis be their object, what possible chance will there be of collecting a force, after the arrival of the enemy, to interpose between them and either of these places? They can proceed, without dropping anchor, to within three hours' rowing and marching of Baltimore, within less of Annapolis, and upon arriving off South River, can debark and be in Washington in a day and a half. This celerity of movement, on their part, is not probable, owing to adverse weather and other causes; but if the enemy has been active, while in our waters, to acquire a knowledge of our country, of which there can be no doubt, and should be favored with weather on the arrival of reinforcements, he can be in Washington, Baltimore, or Annapolis in four days from entering the Capes. But, allowing liberally for all causes of detention, he can be in either of those places in ten days from his arrival. What time will this allow us to hear of his arrival, to disseminate through the intricate and winding channels of the various orders to the militia for them to assemble, have their officers designated, their arms, accoutrements, and ammunition delivered, the necessary supplies provided, or for the commanding officers to

learn the different corps and detachments, so as to issue orders with the promptitude and certainty so necessary to active operations? If the enemy's force should be strong, which, if it comes at all, it will be, sufficient numbers of militia could not be warned and run together, even as a disorderly crowd, without arms, ammunition, or organization, before the enemy would already have given his blow.

"Would it not, then, be expedient to increase the force of my command by immediately calling out a portion of the militia, so that, by previously selecting the best positions for defense, and increasing as far as possible the natural advantages of these positions, the advance of the enemy might be retarded, his force crippled, and time and opportunity thus gained for drawing together whatever other resources of defense might be competent to resist the enemy? The small force of regulars will be incompetent to accomplish any material works at favorable positions for strengthening the defences,, and to supply the various vedette parties which it will be necessary to station on the prominent points of the Bay to watch the enemy, and communicate his movements with the greatest possible dispatch."

To this letter the Secretary of War vouchsafed no reply.

This is a very important letter—important because of several things in and about it, as we shall see.

Yet no one of the national administration gave it any attention.

But General Winder need not have given himself any concern about organizing and equipping a rather large assemblage of militia, for he would not have any large number even to assemble. As already stated, the President's call for militia named conditions that made a compliance impossible, unless the states exercised powers that they did not have!

A copy of the proclamation calling for 93,500 militia—6,000 from Maryland—was not served on the governor of Maryland until July 10th; and not until July 12th was General Winder authorized to call for the Maryland quota in case of "menaced or actual invasion." Certainly the administration believed in leisurely methods! When one considers all the circumstances he would be greatly surprised if Maryland had even assembled any considerable body of militia. Of the Maryland response hereafter.

Pennsylvania, nearby, was to furnish 5,000 militia. In The Battle of Plattsburg, the contempt for the national government, and especially the national administration, shown by the states, is made plain, and will be only mentioned here. The requisition on Pennsylvania did not reach the office of the governor of that state until July 14th—ten days in getting from Washington! The following correspondence is so typical of communications from state authorities to

the national administration that it may well be read with interest. It explains itself:

Letters from the Secretary of the Governor of Pennsylvania to the Secretary of War.

Secretary's office.
July 14, 1814.

SIR,

In the absence of the Governor, I deem it my duty to inform you that your communication containing a requisition for a detachment of 14,000* Pennsylvania militia, came to the office this morning and was immediately forwarded by express to the Governor, at Selin's Grove. Be assured the requisition will be met with all the promptness the circumstances possibly will permit.

With high considerations of respect,

I am, sir,

Your obedient servant,
M. B. Boileau,
Secretary.

John Armstrong, esq. Secretary of War.

Secretary's office,
July 25, 1814.

SIR,

The governor has directed me to inclose to you

---

*Nine thousand—on paper—to go elsewhere than the Tenth Military District.

copies of general orders issued by him in compliance with a late requisition for a military force from Pennsylvania, by the president, communicated by yours under date of the 4th inst. He has not, as you will perceive, designated places of rendezvous: he thinks it will be in time to do so in subsequent orders, which must issue before the troops can march: the threatened point of attack by the enemy will, it is probable, then be better ascertained, and a more prudent selection of place can be made. The repeal of our militia law of 1807, and its several supplements, on the 1st of August next; the disannulling of all commissions by the last session, granted under the old law, except the commissions of such officers as may then be in actual service; the ordering by the new law; the holding of elections of officers by the militia, after the said 1st of August; the notice of election; returns to be made; and the protracting to the 4th Monday of October next the classification of the militia; cause an almost total disorganization of our militia system, between the 1st of August and the 4th of October, and present difficulties, in yielding perfect compliance with the requisition of the president, insurmountable. It is hoped, however, that the patriotism of the people will obviate the difficulty, by a voluntary tender of services, which the governor has invited, growing out of the unaccountable oversight of the legislature. It is strongly doubted wheth-

er any orders can be enforced under the present state of things.*

The requisition refers to the act of Congress passed 28th of February, 1795; under which militia can be held in service three months only; and to the law of 1814, which authorized the president to keep them six months in service. The law of Pennsylvania, passed at the last session of the legislature, required the governor to mention in general orders the period for which any militia ordered into service is to remain on duty. It is desirable, therefore, to know whether the requisition is intended for three or six months service. The offices of deputy quarter master general and assistants and assistant adjutant generals, are not recognized by our state laws.

I have taken the liberty of inclosing to you a copy of the militia law of this state, passed at the last session of the legislature; from a persual of which you will perceive the difficulties under which the executive at present labors, in attempting to comply with the requisition.

With high consideration of respect,

Sir,

Your obedient servant,

N. B. Boileau,

Secretary.

John Armstrong, esq. Secretary of War.

---

*Please consider that the conditions existing in Pennsylvania—a very important state—were existing while the country was at war with Great Britain.

Secretary's office, August 27, 1814.

SIR,

I am directed by the governor to inclose to you a copy of general orders issued yesterday. The letter of general Winder containing the requisition, under date of the 18th instant, was not received until the evening of the twenty-third. The deranged state of our militia system prevented a more prompt compliance with the demand. To obviate as far as possible the inconvenience of delay, the governor has directed the flank and volunteer companies to push on as rapidly as possible, without any regard to the time fixed on for the general rendezvous of the ordinary drafts. The commanding officers of the companies or detachments are instructed to report themselves and the number of their men to General Winder, as the officer who may have command of the troops in the service of the United States, in the 10th military district.

The tents, camp-equipage, as well as arms and accoutrements belonging to the state being insufficient to accommodate the troops called into service, the governor relies on the deficiency being supplied by the United States as promptly as practicable, to render the men comfortable and efficient.

With highest respect and esteem,

Your obedient servant, Sir,

N. B. Boileau,

Secretary.

John Armstrong, esquire, Secretary of War.

It will be observed that this letter is dated three days after the burning of the capitol!

Also, that it is dated 54 days after the proclamation of July 4, calling for the militia!

On that same date—August 27—General Winder wrote to the Secretary of War a long letter—his official report—about the battle of Bladensburg and the burning of the national capital. This letter begins as follows:

"When the enemy arrived at the mouth of the Potomac, of all the militia which I had been authorized to assemble, there were but about 1,700 in the field."

9.

RUNNING AROUND IN CIRCLES.

On the morning of August 16, 1814, "twenty-two sail of enemy's vessels came in from sea, and proceeded up the Chesapeake to join the force previously stationed at the mouth of the Patuxent. The whole force then ascended that river, and on the 19th commenced landing troops at the old village of Benedict, situated about forty miles southeast of Washington. The intelligence was promptly received in Washington, and the questions at once arose, what is the object of the enemy? What is the contemplated point of attack?"*

Monroe wrote to the committee of congress formed to investigate the destruction of the capitol:

"Calling on the President on the morning of the 18th of August, he informed me that the enemy had entered the Patuxent in considerable force, and were landing at Benedict. I remarked that this city (Washington) was their object. He concurred in the opinion."

---

*Williams' Capture of Washington.

Knowing the mental characteristics of Armstrong and his feeling towards Monroe, we are not surprised to be told that on the 18th and later the Secretary of War "derided the notion that the British intended a visit to Washington."

Of those that testified before the committee of congress that investigated the invasion of Washington, was General Van Ness, a prominent man of the highest character. He testified that when the "increased and reinforced" British fleet entered the Patuxent, he called on Secretary Armstrong and expressed his "apprehensions, arising from want of means and preparations, adding that, from the known naval and reputed land force of the enemy, he probably meant to strike a serious blow. His reply was, 'Oh, yes; by G—d, they would not come with such a fleet without meaning to strike somewhere, but they certainly will not come here. What the d—l will they do here? * * * * No, no; Baltimore is the place, sir; this is of so much more consequence.'" However, in his Notices of the War of 1812, Armstrong yet maintains that the "first and great object" of the British was to destroy Barney's flotilla, and that the attack on Washington was a casual enterprise—an afterthought of General Ross.

General Winder believed from the first that the enemy intended to attack Annapolis—and the best reasons favored that conjecture. But, also, he thought that the squadron might be "intended to unite with

the land force, and co-operate in a joint attack on Washington." Williams, who was not unfriendly to Winder, says:

"General Winder's doubts as to the objects and destination of the enemy continued from the time of the debarkation at Benedict on the 18th of August, until within three hours of the commencement of the battle of Bladensburg on the 24th."

Winder says himself, in his account of the battle, and referring to his own position at the Eastern Branch Bridge, near the Navy Yard, after nine o'clock of the morning of the battle:

"My patrols and vedettes not having yet brought me any intelligence of a movement of the enemy (from his bivouac twelve miles from Washington) and being still doubtful whether he might not move on Annapolis, Fort Washington, or towards the bridge rather than Bladensburg, I held the position near the bridge as that which, under all circumstances, would enable me best to act against the enemy in any alternative."

Thus up to less than three hours before the beginning of the battle of Bladensburg, there was no certainty among the four active American commanders—already mentioned, and of which later—as to the movement of the enemy.

From the landing at Benedict, the objective of the enemy was believed by

Madison and Monroe to be Washington.

Armstrong to be Baltimore.

Winder to be Annapolis.

But no one was sure.

As the result of this uncertainty, it was attempted to protect three points, and also to guard three avenues of approach—by Bladensburg; by the Eastern Branch Bridge; and from Fort Washington. And all knew—when too late—that the available force was not sufficient for one point.

It is now our hard and unpleasant task to follow, for some days before the battle at Bladensburg, the two parts of that available force; for we must do this to understand the physical and mental condition of the American forces that participated in the battle at Bladensburg.

To begin our task, with the most competent guide —John S. Williams, "Brigade Major and Inspector, Columbian Brigade, in the War of 1812:"

"The brigade of District militia under General Smith left the Capital in the afternoon of the 20th of August, taking the road for Nottingham, and halted for the night about four miles from the Eastern Branch." General Smith reported that they "were here overtaken by their baggage, when it was ascertained there was great deficiency of necessary camp equipage, the public stores being exhausted; many of the troops were compelled to lie out in the open field; and of the essential article of flints, upon a requi-

sition of one thousand, only two hundred could be had." The next day, which was Sunday, those troops, "after a hot and fatiguing march," as expressed by General Smith, arrived at "the Wood Yard, about fifteen miles from Washington and twelve from Nottingham." Here other troops were assembled; and on this day, the 21st, Sunday, General Winder joined the force at the Wood Yard.

At sunrise on Monday General Winder ordered a body of his best troops, about 800, "to proceed immediately to Nottingham, to meet the enemy," the rest of the force to follow and support. General Winder and his staff, "accompanied by Colonel Monroe," proceeded in advance of the first body, "and upon arriving within half a mile of the place where the road from Nottingham forks, they received intelligence that the enemy was moving in force towards the junction." At this time the advance body of American troops was about two miles from the junction and the rest about two miles in the rear. The American troops were ordered to stop and select the best defensive positions. But Ross, who, on reaching the junction, had proceeded some distance on the road to the Wood Yard, after halting for an hour or more, took "the road to Marlborough, thus renewing General Winder's uncertainty as to his purposes. In consequence, an order was given for the whole force to retire, on the same road on which they had advanced, to a place called the Long or Battalion Old Fields, about eight miles from Wash-

ington. This movement in advance, therefore, resulted in nothing but the fatigue and discouragement of the troops. It was judicious in General Winder to avoid an engagement, because his force was wholly insufficient. But that was known before the movement began; and if it was wise to retire, it certainly was unwise to have advanced."*

When these troops had rejoined the others, left at the Wood Yard, the entire force "retired to encamp at the Long Old Fields," and, says Wilkinson, "like all retrograde movements in the face of an enemy, this disheartened the men and officers."

As our object is to determine the condition of the forces in the battle at Bladensburg, it is proper for us to know that "Ross arrived at Marlborough about two o'clock in the afternoon of the 22d, and remained there until the same hour the next day, having abundant time to rest and refresh his troops, and being perfectly unmolested. They employed themselves in securing and sending off tobacco and other plunder."

To rejoin our troops at Long Old Fields—very tired, very hot, ill equipped.

Soon after the troops reached Long Old Fields, General Winder was informed that the President and cabinet had arrived at a house about a mile in the rear

*Wilkinson is not disposed to excuse any one, but he says, "if a fault was then committed, he (Winder) should not be held responsible, for he was attended by a minister of the cabinet (Monroe), an old soldier, by whose advice he was doubtless influenced."

of the camp. There is no record that this gave him any great joy and he certainly did not use any undue haste in calling on the distinguished meddlers. "He detached a captain's guard to their quarters, but was himself too much overwhelmed with business to wait upon the President until next morning."

It will be recalled that General Winder had not been provided with any of the usual assistants, to handle details. He says:

"After having waded through the infinite applications, consultations, and calls necessarily arising from a body of 2,500 men, not three days from their homes, without organization, or any practical knowledge of service on the part of their officers, and being obliged to listen to the officious but well-intended information and advice of the crowd, who, at such a time, would be full of both, I lay down to snatch a moment of rest."

But it could have been only "a moment of rest," for, "to add to the fatigue and discouragement" of the troops, they "were roused about 2 o'clock in the morning of the 23rd by a false alarm from a sentinel, were formed in order of battle, and when dismissed, were ordered to hold themselves ready for their posts at a moment's warning. This was the second successive night they had been needlessly deprived of their rest. Shortly after daybreak orders were given to strike their tents, load the baggage-wagons, and have all in readiness to move in the course of an hour. The troops

were then got under arms, and were reviewed by the President and suite."

The worn-out troops that we have been accompanying were "ordered to move in the direction of Marlborough, reconnoitre the enemy, approach him as near as possible without running too much risk, and annoy him whether he should be stationary or in motion."

General Winder led a troop towards Bladensburg, to confer with General Stansbury—of whom later—but after the troop had marched ten miles, in the hot August sun, it was called back by the intelligence conveyed to Winder that the troops sent towards Marlborough had skirmished with the enemy and been driven back, and were then halted within three miles of the Old Fields; and that all the troops at Old Fields were "drawn up ready to receive the enemy, should he make an attack."

Marching in the vicinity of Washington, in August, and standing in line, is not refreshing. Ross was at this time resting and refreshing his troops.

The American troops were kept in line "until near sun-down!" It was then determined to retire across the Eastern Branch Bridge. Winder gives good reasons for this move—if the enemy had done certain things. There is good evidence that apprehension—and without cause—was the first reason, and there are grounds to believe this apprehension started in the farm house around which Winder had kept a captain's guard!

One of the prominent citizens of Washington, a soldier in the American army, Mr. John Law, testified before the committee of congress:

"Although our march in the retreat was extremely rapid, yet orders were occasionally given to captains of companies to hurry on their men. The march, therefore, literally became a run of eight miles; and the propriety of this rapid movement, which unnecessarily fatigued and dispirited the men, may be tested by the fact that the main body of the enemy bivouacked that night on the Melwood estate, more than three miles distant from the ground we had left."

These troops, retreating from a force about which they knew nothing definitely, moved hither and thither without regard to plan or reason so far as they could see, finally reached Washington at the close of the 23rd, worn out, poorly equipped, dispirited. General Smith, the brigade commander, says that they, "much wearied and exhausted, encamped late at night" within the capital. He says—and being in command of the brigade, and an able soldier and trustworthy man, what he says may be considered as a correct and also conservative statement:

"Thus terminated the four days of service of the troops of this district preceding the affair at Bladensburg. They had been under arms, with but little intermission, the whole of the time, both day and night; had travelled, during their different marches in advance and retreat, a considerable tract of country, ex-

posed to the burning heat of a sultry summer day, and many of them to the cold dews of the night, uncovered. They had, in this period, drawn but two rations, the requisition therefor, in the first instance, being but partially complied with, and it being afterwards almost impossible to procure the means of transportation, the wagons employed by our quartermaster for that purpose being constantly impressed by the government agents for the purpose of removing the public records, when the enemy's approach was known, and some of them thus seized while proceeding to take in provisions for the army. These hardships and privations could not but be severely distressing to men, the greater part of whom possessed and enjoyed at home the means of comfortable living, and from their usual habits and pursuits of life but ill qualified to endure them. They, however, submitted without murmuring, evincing by their patience, their zeal, and the promptitude with which they obeyed every order, a magnanimity highly honorable to their character. Great as was their merit in this respect, it was no less so in the spirit manifested whenever an order was given to march to meet the foe; and at the Long Old Fields, where his attack was momentarily expected in overwhelming force they displayed, in presence of many spectators, although scarce any of them had ever been in action, a firmness, a resolution, and an intrepidity which, whatever might have been the result, did honor to their country."

These men were ready to fight. They wanted to fight. And whenever any of them had competent commanders, they fought extremely well indeed, and in almost every case victoriously, although at times against great odds. The troops under General Smith did not complain when they were marched back and forth, beneath the broiling August sun of the vicinity of Washington, many of them without any shelter at night, and with, during the four days, only two rations, one of them only a partial one!

The memory of these men may well inspire our soldiers at any time. And we may be sure that at all times our troops will exhibit the same patience, fortitude and courage—will be worthy of those that before them have fought under The Star Spangled Banner.

The troops that encamped in Washington the night of the 23rd, were kept in uncertainty until eleven the next morning, when they were very hurriedly marched to the battlefield near Bladensburg—situated about six miles northeast of Washington. They reached the battle-ground just as the action began and had scarcely time "to make a hasty selection of position."

Doubtless the reader thinks that he has been reading of the troops that were most unfortunately treated. By no means! The Maryland militia, under General Tobias E. Stansbury, and which formed nearly all the first line at Bladensburg, were even worse treated. As to this, I can not do better than quote from General Stansbury's letter to the committee of congress that

investigated the destruction of the capitol:

"On Saturday, August 20th, about one o'clock P. M., I received by express letter No. 1, directing me to move down with my whole force for Washington.*

"I immediately issued orders for wagons to be procured, provisions served out, tents struck, and everything prepared to march that evening. But the difficulty of obtaining wagons to transport tents and camp equipage prevented my moving more than a part of the brigade this evening. The residue followed on the morning of the 21st. The advanced party camped at the Stag tavern; the rear three miles short of it, on the evening of the 21st.

"About 10 o'clock P. M. I received from General Winder by express letter No. 2, dated the 21st, directing me to halt until further orders. August 22nd, at 10 o'clock A. M., received from General Winder letter No. 3, dated at the Wood Yard the 21st, 10 o'clock P. M., directing me to advance with all speed to Bladensburg. In consequence thereof, the line of march was taken up immediately, and at 7 o'clock P. M. we arrived at Bladensburg * * * * About 10 o'clock A. M. (the 23rd) received from General Winder letter No. 4, dated at Headquarters, Battalion Old Fields, August 22nd, containing orders to march my brigade slowly toward Marlborough, and take a position on the road not far from that place. The brigade was instantly

*At this time his brigade was encamped one and a half miles north of Baltimore.

put in motion, and the march commenced towards Marlborough. * * * * * After proceeding about one mile on the road to Marlborough, I met Captain Moses Tabbs riding express to inform me that the enemy, with their whole force, had left Marlborough, and were on their march toward me, distant about six miles. This information made me determine to avail myself of the high grounds I occupied in the morning, to which I immediately returned, and made the necessary preparations to receive the enemy.* I directed Captain Tabbs to return and reconnoitre the enemy, and give me every information. About 4 o'clock P. M. he returned, and informed me that the enemy, on leaving Marlborough, had taken a different route. Soon after, my aid-de-camp, Major Woodyear, returned from General Winder, and informed me that the intelligence I had received of the movements of the enemy was in part incorrect, and that General Winder wished me to encamp on the direct road from Bladensburg to Marlborough, at about seven miles distant from the latter place. * * * * * By letter No. 4 I was first informed that Lieutenant-Colonel Sterett's detachment, were attached to my command. * * * * About sunset on the 23rd he (Sterett) arrived with his command. The fatigued condition of his troops induced me to halt for the night on the hill near Bladensburg, with

*At this time he had a force of only 1,353, officers and men. The British force was reported at this time to be from 7,000 to 10,000 men.

the intention of moving toward Marlborough at reveille on the 24th. At about 8 o'clock P. M. a militia captain * * * came into camp, and informed me he was from General Winder's camp at Battalion Old Fields * * * * that a detachment from the army had skirmished that day with the British. * * * * About 11 o'clock P. M. the Secretary of State, Colonel Monroe, with several gentlemen, came to my tent * * * * and advised vigilance to prevent surprise. Soon after the departure of Colonel Monroe, the advance pickets, on the road by which we expected the enemy, and which was the direct one from Marlborough, fired, and in a few moments my whole command was under arms and prepared for action. * * * * The troops were under arms until after 2 A. M. of the 24th, when, being advised by the cavalry that the enemy were not near, I ordered them to retire to their tents, but to be ready to turn out at a moment's notice. * * * * About half after 2 o'clock A. M., Major Bates came to me from Washington, with a message from General Winder informing me that General Winder had retreated from Battalion Old Fields into the city of Washington. * * * ** Thus was my expectation of security from the Battalion and river roads cut off, my right flank and rear uncovered, and liable to be attacked and turned. * * * * Orders were instantly given to strike tents and prepare to march, and in about thirty minutes, without noise or confusion, the whole were in motion, and about half past 3 o'clock in the morn-

ing passed the bridge at Bladensburg leading to the city of Washington. Securing our rear from surprise, we halted in the road until the approach of day, with a view of finding some place where water could be had, in order that the men might cook their provisions. The provisions consisted of salt beef in inferior quality, the flour old and musty. At daylight I moved on to the foot of a hill near a brick-yard, and there ordered the troops to refresh themselves. This was about one and one-half miles from Bladensburg. Early in the morning, I had dispatched Major Goodyear to Washington to inform General Winder of my movements and situation, of the exhausted state of the troops, and the impracticability of their meeting the enemy, in their present fatigued state. * * * A note was presented to me by an express from General Winder * * * * directing me to oppose the enemy as long as I could. * * * * I called a council of war * ** * * Colonel Sterett observed that he marched from Baltimore with a determination to defend the city; that his men, the day before, by a forced march, reached Bladensburg without halting to cook; that they had been under arms nearly the whole of the night, without sleep or food; that Major Pinkney's riflemen, and the two companies of artillery, were in the same situation; that they were so completely worn down and exhausted that he would consider it a sacrifice of both men and officers to seek the enemy. * * * * * At this moment Major Woodyear returned from Washington,

with positive orders from General Winder to give the enemy battle at Bladensburg. * * * * I immediately ordered the troops to retrace their steps to Bladensburg, determined to maintain, if possible, the ground at all hazards."

It was these troops, marched and countermarched, forward and back, all the day and through the night, not an hour for rest, much less sleep, "their only provision salt beef of an inferior quality, and old and musty flour, and no time to cook that," marched and marched back again in the morning, ready to drop from hunger and fatigue, that two or three hours later had to meet the British!*

What was the physical condition, and resultant morale, of the opposing forces?

During the three days after the British army landed at Benedict they advanced only fifteen miles and

---

*Possibly Laval's cavalry suffered most of all. It was on constant duty, reconnoitering, patrolling and escorting "from the afternoon of the 21st until 11 at night of the 23rd, when it reached the Eastern Branch Bridge, 'both men and horses hungry and harassed with fatigue,' and **remained in that condition** until the next morning. They then succeeded in procuring a stack of hay, and the men were in the act of fetching it on their heads to feed their famished horses, when the trumpet sounded, and they were compelled to drop it and mount, a number of the horses being unable to proceed." Yet the cavalry managed to reach the battle ground before the battle of Bladensburg, and they "seem to have been considered as a part of the first line." Laval, a Frenchman and an officer of experience, stated, in his account to the congressional committee, that his men were unable to make a charge: "the men, from fatigue and hunger, hardly able to sit their horses, or the horses to move."

rested quietly each night. Williams says that they took time "to amuse themselves during the day by plundering the country bordering on their line of march, and to regale themselves on the summer fruits and melons." A Subaltern in America says of the troops landed at Benedict that some were "lying at full length upon the grass, basking in the beams of a sultry sun, and apparently made happy by the very feeling of the green sod under them. Others were running and leaping about." Speaking of them later, after the night spent at Marlborough, he says: "Fresh, and in excellent spirits, we rose next morning, and, having stood the usual time with our men, began to consider how we should most profitably and agreeably spend the day. * * *The attacks which they from time to time made upon farm-yards and pig-styes were, to a certain degree at least, allowable enough. It would have been unreasonable to expect that hungry soldiers, in an enemy's country, would sit down to digest their hunger, while flocks of poultry and herds of swine were within their reach. And then with respect to tobacco, that principal delicacy of soldiers upon active service, there was no reasonable cause for scarcity or complaint." The Subaltern in more than one page of his interesting history, details the moves made by officers and men to keep their stomachs well filled with the delicacies of the countryside. The stores of preserves were especially relished and more than one respectable wine cellar was discovered. Sustenance was so abund-

ant that "the quarter-master arriving soon after the halt with stores of bread and rum, an additional allowance of both was served out, as well to the men as to the officers."

The British army felt itself secure. It had, during one night, at least, no pickets, though Winder and his army were only a few miles away. Of its nights between landing and the battle at Bladensburg, all but the last afforded a full night's comfortable rest (for this army was well equipped) "with nothing to disturb their repose and self-complacency." The night of the 23rd was the only one that did not give them long repose—Ross put them in motion the morning of the 24th some time before four o'clock. But that was to avoid marching in the heat of the day. Always they marched slowly—while our troops were hurried back and forth; always they were complacent and contemptuously indifferent—while our troops were kept in uncertainty and apprehension; always they rested during the day and reposed comfortably at night—while our troops lay in the open, and were not allowed one full night's undisturbed rest; always they had full rations and even more—while our troops got less than two rations in four days. . .

10.

THREE COMMANDERS TOO MANY.

We have seen that the American troops were marched and counter-marched, day after day and also night after night, and when not marching were often kept standing in the ranks; and during all this had only partial rations, of poor quality—at times none at all; in fact, were handled, not as any good strategy or commonsense would have dictated, but clearly without settled plan or purpose, and certainly in a way that outraged all military rules and all intelligence and commonsense. If the British commander of the invading forces had been allowed to specify what should be done with and to the American troops, he could hardly have conceived—for he was an intelligent military man—of anything that would have been so favorable to him as the very things that were done. If those responsible for the movements and treatment of the American troops assembling and assembled to meet the British Chesapeake expedition had endeavored to do that which would be the most helpful to the

British, they could hardly have succeeded better. But the British commanders can not be blamed for the outrage perpetrated on our troops, for what was done was so incredibly stupid and vicious that it never occurred to the British that anything of the sort was being done!

On whom, then, must the blame rest? There is a great and somewhat stinking mess of conflicting statements and so-called evidence. This mess leaves some things in doubt, but it makes it plain that the blame must rest on these four:

Armstrong, Secretary of War—the most.

Monroe, Secretary of State—next.

Madison, President and Commander-in-Chief.

Winder, Commander under the preceding—the least.

We have been advised in the preceding chapter of the arrival of the President and members of his cabinet at Long Old Fields the evening of August 22nd. Unfortunately this was not the beginning and by no means the end of the meddling, and most unintelligent meddling, of Madison, Monroe and Armstrong. They were "in the field" during the two days before the battle, and, what was yet far more unfortunate, they were on the field the day of the battle!

Williams says in his most enlightening volume:

"The President of the United States is, by the highest law of the land, commander-in-chief of the army and navy; and President Madison was actually

in the field and exercising command. The Secretary of War is the channel of communication from the President to all officers of the army, high and low, and any suggestion or request from him is equivalent to an order. Secretary Armstrong was also in the field, and in addition to the authority of his official position, he was considered by many, and certainly considered himself, to possess profound military science, as well as some military experience. Colonel Monroe, the Secretary of State, from the outset took an active interest and share in the practical operation of the campaign. General Winder was under the immediate personal supervision of these high functionaries, all much older than himself, and he, instead of having the prestige of a high military reputation to support him in case of difference of opinion, had yet a reputation to achieve."

The National Intelligencer, the Washington paper that existed almost altogether to advance the political interests of the administration, said in its issue of August 30th:

"The President of the United States was not only active during the engagement which took place with the enemy, but had been exerting himself two or three days previous, and has been personally active ever since. Everyone joins in attributing to him the greatest merit."

That is interesting as showing the very low depth

to which journalistic and political flunkeyism could reach at that time.

The miscalled exertions of the President, very nearly altogether verbal, during the two or three days before the battle will have brief, and adequate, treatment later. As for his activities on the day of the battle, they also will have mention in a later chapter.

With Madison—Monroe—Armstrong—Winder all active in the field, any result except victory was possible and no result that was discreditable could be surprising.

The first and most essential requisite of all military movements is the authority and direction of one mind and will. In his instructions to his generals, Frederick the Great quotes and endorses the saying of Prince Eugene that "a general who wishes to avoid a battle need only call a council of war."

The most blame is put upon General Armstrong because, as Secretary of War, his duty was plain, was defined, and it was urgent—to do what he could to make the military forces of the United States more than a match for those of the enemy. Instead of doing what he could he did more nearly as little as he could. His stubbornness has been referred to: he would not believe that Washington was in any danger. He treated with discourtesy those that, intelligently and rightly apprehensive, sought to have him take proper measures for defense. Instead of acting promptly and

with vigor, he was both feeble and dilatory in the little that he did. His stubbornness was not the only reason for his attitude, and in justice to him this other reason, referred to in a previous chapter, should be mentioned. He had recommended for the post given General Winder (and, as we have seen, if not for political reasons, at least the reasons of the politician) Brigadier-General Moses Porter, an experienced, tried, and rather able commander. General Armstrong was very much chagrined that General Porter was not put in command of the American forces in the vicinity of Washington, and he had a right to be. In the summer of 1814, the 5th Military District, which included the District of Columbia, Maryland and Virginia, was commanded by General Porter. It would have aroused too much public criticism to have removed him or to have put General Winder over him; hence out of his district was carved the new 10th Military District. It was freely said and written, especially during the controversy over the burning of the capitol, and apparently no real effort was ever made to disprove it, that Colonel Monroe was responsible for the 10th Military District and Winder, and for this reason: It would not do to allow a commanding general to get such glory from a victory over the British that he could aspire to the nomination for the Presidency; hence a really able commander, especially if his record were such that the troops would have in him that confidence that is such an important influence for victory, would

be too dangerous. Further, Colonel Monroe intended to be active on the field of battle—and apparently both he and Madison thought at the time that when it occurred the battle would be a victory for our forces—and he hoped and expected to get no small glory from his part in the battle;* but that would be impossible if General Porter were in command, for such was his repute as a commander that Colonel Monroe could not hope possibly to shine very brilliantly with him on the field; especially as Porter was an exceedingly bluff old soldier that probably would not stand for any interference or other nonsense. It is certain that General Armstrong urgently recommended that General Porter be called from his headquarters at Norfolk, which he "had made impregnable to any force which the enemy could bring against it," and be given the immediate task of organizing and equipping an army that, under his command, would meet and defeat the invaders. It is equally certain that when General Armstrong found that his recommendation would not be heeded he, on one occasion, at least, did the graceful thing, and signed the order for the creation of the 10th Military District; and he did this although it did not correctly state the reasons for the creation of the

*The eyes of the whole people would be upon the defenders of Washington; a brilliant volunteer achievement, accomplished without the orders acknowledged of the commanding general, would win for him the hearts of his countrymen, and render his future elevation sure.—Capture of Washington by Williams.

district. It has been suggested that the reason for this was General Armstrong's desire to obtain the nomination for the Presidency and therefore his disposition to do what would please the President; but this surely does him an injustice. He could, and, at times, he did, show a broad, generous spirit. Thus, in his Memoirs, written after the War of 1812, and when certainly he had reason to think bitterly of the events of that War, and of the blame unjustly put on him for "the Invasion of the City of Washington," he writes dispassionately and fairly of the appointment of General Winder and of his (Armstrong's) desire to have General Porter appointed, and adds: "No objection to General Winder, except a want of military experience, either was or could be made; his patriotism and courage had already been tested, and were generally acknowledged."

Armstrong might have been more receptive, alert, prompt and energetic in doing his part to provide a force adequate to meet the British army if General Porter had been in immediate command of that force. But the fact can not be gainsaid that as Secretary of War in his office in Washington he fell far short of his full duty. He was stubbornly blind and inactive.

Yet even greater blame may properly be put on him because he left his office in Washington and, like Madison and Monroe, journeyed to Long Old Fields August 22nd. His object, as was the object of Monroe, was to get more in the public eye, to be more

prominent in the military operations, to get a greater portion of the glory—it actually appears that victory, rather than defeat, was expected! Monroe was much less culpable than Armstrong, for the duties of the Secretary of State at that time did not confine him closely to Washington. It was very different as regards the Secretary of War. With an army to be assembled, organized, equipped and properly officered, the proper place for the Secretary of War could be only in his office in the city of Washington, for only there could he transact the heavy and important business that it was imperative he should transact to do his work as Secretary of War. In his office at Washington he would be sought by those that had business to transact with him; there were the records, assistants, aids and means essential to the transaction of his urgent business.

Armstrong was much to blame for neglecting the business of the Secretary of War while he was in Washington; he was more to blame for deserting his office and his business altogether. The proper place for the Secretary of War, who is an executive, not a commander, is in his office, and not in the field. In the field he can do only one of two things—interfere or, more happily, nothing. And in the field he can not possibly escape the neglect of his proper work. For whatever reason he leaves his office he condemns himself as not a good Secretary of War. Armstrong must bear most of the blame for the failure at Bladensburg

because of his inefficiency while in Washington and even more because he left Washington.

Monroe is blamed more than Madison because he was useless while he hindered as much and meddled even more—especially on the field at Bladensburg—and he had even less excuse for meddling. As for usefulness, General Wilkinson gives the following account, which he says he had from "an officer of character, rank, and intelligence," and there is abundant other evidence to corroborate:

"During the morning of the 24th I was repeatedly in the tent of General Winder, where I found the President, the Secretaries of War and of the Navy, and the Attorney-general assembled, to deliberate on the state of things and aid the general (Winder) with their counsel. Observing no privacy in their deliberations, the interest I took in the public welfare prompted me to intrude some of my own ideas, more especially as a palpably erroneous opinion appeared to prevail that the enemy would approach by that bridge, and that the troops ought therefore to be detained where they were to defend it. I felt anxious they should move to Bladensburg early, and unite with the militia which had arrived from Baltimore, because it would require a great deal of time to post the men advantageously, and to communicate the orders and instructions how to act, according to the various chances and events of battle. It seemed mere folly to expect the enemy by way of the bridge, where a dozen men, with half an

hour's notice, by destroying it, might arrest their progress. General Armstrong suggested they might lay a bridge of pontoons; I answered, it was impossible; to which he replied, with a sneer, that the word impossible was not to be found in the military vocabulary. The mere belief that an army, certainly short of 7 or 8,000 men, destitute, as we knew them to be, of horses to transport their artillery and baggage could, notwithstanding, contrive to carry an equipage of pontoons sufficient for laying a bridge across a river nearly half a mile wide, demonstrated that General Armstrong's knowledge of pontoon bridges extended not much beyond the name.

"The conversation at General Winder's quarters during the morning was rather desultory; first one suggestion was made and commented on, and then another; no idea seemed to be entertained that it was necessary to come instantly to a decision how we should act, and to set immediately about it. When I mentioned the certainty of the enemy approaching by the route of Bladensburg in preference to the bridge, and the expediency of taking post there without further delay, I observed my opinion to produce some effect on the mind of the President; by the others it was not much regarded."

The reader is advised to read the quotation again, considering carefully all the points therein, being careful to keep in mind that the British forces had landed a few miles away the 18th, that they had been in that

neighborhood for six days, and that at the headquarters of the commanding general the morning of the day of the battle of Bladensburg there was no definite knowledge of the numbers of the British force; of its movements, although it had been on the march since three o'clock that morning: only the sheerest conjectures of its destination—and they wrong; no plan of action decided on, or even being seriously considered, and no disposition to prompt, energetic action; all was "desultory!"

Mr. Rush, the Attorney-General, in his letter to the committee of congress to investigate "the Invasion of the City of Washington," said of this morning of August 24th at General Winder's headquarters:

"I there found the President, General Winder and two or three military officers. The Secretary of State, I understood, had previously been there, but had gone on to Bladensburg. The Secretary of the Navy came into the room not long afterwards. The conversation turned upon the route by which it was thought most likely the enemy would make his approach. It was interrupted by dragoons, who had been on scouts, coming in every few minutes with their reports. The preponderance of opinion, at this period, I took it to be, that he would be most likely to move in a direction toward the Potomac, with a view to possess himself of Fort Warburton (Fort Washington) in the first instance. This way of thinking induced, as I supposed, General Winder to retain a large

portion of his force in the neighborhood of the Eastern Branch Bridge, in preference to moving it on towards Bladensburg. * * * * After the lapse of probably an hour from the time I reached headquarters, an express arrived from General Stansbury, commanding the Baltimore troops at Bladensburg, rendering it at length certain that the British army was advancing in that direction. General Winder immediately put his troops in motion, and marched off with them for Bladensburg.

"When he had left the house, the Secretary of War, in company with the Secretary of the Treasury, arrived there. The President mentioned to the former the information which had just been received, at the same time asking him whether, as it was probable a battle would soon be brought on, he had any advice or plan to offer upon the occasion. He replied, that he had not. He added that, as it was to be between regulars and militia, the latter would be beaten. All who were in the house then came out, the Secretary of War getting on his horse to go to Bladensburg."

Major Williams observes that "it appears, therefore, that General Armstrong went, or rather was ordered, to Bladensburg for the purpose of making exertions to falsify his own prediction as to the result. He had to choose between endeavoring to save his reputation as a military man and his credit as a prophet, and the latter was certainly the easier task of the two."

It was, when the destruction of the capital was a

live topic, rather freely insinuated that Armstrong found his vindication as a prophet not only the easier task, but the more agreeable task. The manuscript papers of President Madison showed that on the 23rd and 24th of August the President and the Secretary of War had very little direct communication with each other, that there was great reserve between them, and that Armstrong told the truth when he wrote of the moment of departure from Winder's headquarters for Bladensburg: "I again met the President, who told me that he had come to a new determination, and that the military functionaries should be left to the discharge of their duties, on their own responsibility. I now became, of course, a mere spectator of the combat."

To sum up: The Secretary of War offered no plan of campaign; doubtless he had none; and if he had had one, the probabilities are that he would not have divulged it, as he did not desire to do anything to aid General Winder, who had been appointed contrary to his wishes. Further, no one else—President, Secretary of State, Winder or any one else in authority—had any plan. All were most excellent Micawbers, waiting for something to turn up. Even as late as after nine o'clock of the morning of the 24th there was the same indifference, the same lassitude, the same lack of information, the same lack of plan and of action, the same hesitancy, vacillation, inefficiency, as

well as of common sense and military intelligence, that there had been since the War began.*

Was a successful plan of campaign against the British force possible? Yes—easy and certain. Of that in another chapter. Was Armstrong right—must militia always be defeated by regulars? Let Plattsburg and New Orleans answer. If Macomb or Jackson or Harrison had been in command of the 10th Military District; if the Secretary of War had been competent for his place and had stayed where he could do his work and had done it, instead of seeking publicity by being with the army; and if Madison and Monroe had kept away, the British under Ross would have been grievously defeated. But ifs, even an array of them, do not win battles.

The least blame is placed on General Winder because all the evidence is that he did his very best, and had from no one in position to give him real aid near the help that he had a right to expect. There is abundant evidence, some of which appears in this book, that he labored hard during the day and late into the night, that he travelled from place to place, that he made the greatest exertions, to assemble, equip and put into shape an efficient force; and everywhere he met with indifference and procrastination, if not actual opposition—none the less actual because often covert. Yet

---

*Only Winder and Monroe displayed physical energy and activity. Monroe was active because, most of all, he wished to be President.

further, as is made plain from what has preceded in this chapter, for days before the battle and even on the day of battle, he was under the eye and direction of the President and Commander-in-Chief, the Secretary of War, and Colonel Monroe—all three his superiors, and two of them regarding themselves as men of much greater military ability. As Brigade-Major Williams observes, "General Winder was the commanding general in little more than name, and that his movements were influenced, if not actually dictated, by his supervisors, who were neither in harmony among themselves, nor consistent any one with himself, and one of whom, General Armstrong, was not likely, from his self-willed and resentful disposition, to be over-zealous in his efforts to produce a result which would justify Mr. Madison's selection of General Winder instead of General Porter as the commanding-general."

11.

STRATEGY AND TACTICS.

In the preceding chapter it was asserted that a successful plan of campaign against the British force that burned the capitol could have been devised and executed.

The total American force at the battle of Bladensburg was 5,435—4410 militia, 380 regulars, 125 dragoons, 400 sailors and 120 marines. The British force was 3,540, all regulars.

In addition to the troops actually at or near Bladensburg, as enumerated in the preceding paragraph, there were other troops that should have been employed. There was a brigade of 500 militia and volunteers, which included a company of cavalry. They were unusually efficient for militia and volunteers. They reported to General Winder August 18th. The only use made of them was to defend the approach to Fort Washington—no real use at all. Also, a regiment of Virginia militia, 600 infantry and 100 cavalry, but they could not get arms until August 24th, after the

battle of Bladensburg! And about 500 additional troops, including about 200 cavalry, in several small bodies.

The battles of Plattsburg and New Orleans show that, rightly used, the American troops would have defeated the British.

Not in a pitched battle; not in any one battle unless the militia had some protection or cover—and which they easily could have had when the time arrived.

What, then, should have been the strategy, the plan of campaign, of the Americans?

For a time, at least, the very opposite of that which is generally the best strategy.

It is a military axiom that "He who divides his force will be beaten in detail." The corollary was expressed by that master of strategy, Bonaparte, who said that "the whole art of war consists in being the strongest on a given point."* Another authority has said that the object of strategy should be always "to operate a combined effort with the greatest possible mass of force upon the decisive point." Another military maxim is, Divide et impera—Divide and conquer. It is axiomatic, and applies to many things other than war, and it is older and more fundamental than any scientific warfare. Another authority, Frederick, said that "the talent of a great captain consists in inducing the enemy to divide his forces." It might be added that

---

*Count de Segur's Campaign in Russia, book VII, chap. 8.

generally the efforts of the great strategist will be to compel the enemy to divide his forces—will be to divide the forces of the enemy. This was one-half of the favorite strategy of Bonaparte. The other half was to strike with all his force. It was the secret of his success from Montenotte to Ligny. Two days after Ligny he ignored his favorite strategy while Wellington succeeded late in the day in completing this strategy and the result was Waterloo. One of the very greatest commanders the United States has ever produced, General "Stonewall" Jackson, said that right strategy was "getting there fust with the mostest men."* As pointed out in The Battle of Plattsburg, the Plattsburg expedition and also the New Orleans expedition was founded on the strategy to divide the forces of the enemy. It was this same strategy which resulted in "the Father of Waters" flowing "unvexed to the sea." Sherman's March to the Sea was dictated by it. It has been the rule of all great commanders to strike with superior force—superior in number, or equipment, or training and experience, or morale—at the vital point; and nearly all successful campaigns have been the result of this.

But there are properly exceptions to every rule,

---

*Some have actually concluded that because Jackson used this language he was uneducated and used only such language! Like most very serious and religious men, Jackson had a keen, subtle sense of humor; and he also knew that a great truth may often be made more effective by picturesque or peculiar expression.

and some of the most successful campaigns have been because a commander had the daring and resource to go contrary to the rule just discussed. Perhaps the best example of such a campaign is found in Bonaparte's invasion of Russia in 1812. The Russian generals avoided a decisive battle; they divided and retreated, but harassed and nagged, while detachments bit at the French-and-allies army like stinging insects —Bonaparte ravaged Lithunia, but all the time swarms of Cossacks hung on his flanks and in Lithunia alone he lost more than 100,000 soldiers—dead of disease and hardship, but many killed or captured by the harassing parties of Russians. It was this that laid the foundation of Leipzig little more than a year later. It was this strategy—avoidance of a pitched battle and the constant harassment of mobile parties taking all advantage of every natural feature of the theatre of operations—that should have opposed the British that landed at Benedict and which doubtless would have been successful.

This strategy was urged, but it was ignored. It was freely charged that it was ignored, and a pitched battle was insisted on, because not the proper strategy but a pitched battle would allow of the spectacular performance on the field of battle of a certain aspirant for the Presidency—a performance that would not only advance him toward the coveted nomination, but would also add to the prestige and popularity of the national administration.

Doubtless there was some good reason for this charge. But it is nearer the truth to say that no one connected with the movements of the American forces —from Madison to Winder* and beyond, had any plan of campaign or any strategy whatever. (Armstrong would be excepted, but he really had no voice in determining those movements). Williams says, referring to the conferences in which the President took the lead and his expressed notions about certain military matters, that it appeared that the Secretary of War and others were to "leave strategic operations to be determined by the President in cabinet, aided by lights derived from Grotius and Puffendorff, instead of Lloyd, Tempelhoff, and Jomini."

In another place Williams, a soldier of ability and experience, with a record always creditable, and in 1814 "Brigade Major and Inspector, Columbian Brigade" (District of Columbia troops) says:

"There is no treatise on strategy which can provide for all the circumstances of a general's position, and no one has acknowledged this more fully and frankly than Jomini himself. * * * * Nevertheless, the art of war has been reduced to certain fixed rules, and there is such a science as strategy, the principles of which are not to be despised because they are not infallible.

---

*A letter that Winder wrote to Armstrong a few days after he was appointed to the command of the 10th District, rather feebly points out the right strategy; but apparently Winder dropped it at once and during August had neither strategy nor plan.

And the plan of harassing the enemy recommended by General Armstrong and General Wilkinson, though it made detachments necessary, so far from being against the principles of the art of war, was in perfect conformity with them. Writers on the art of war recommend, and common sense dictates, that the weaker of two belligerents should, as a rule, resort to harassing guerilla warfare rather than to pitched battles, more particularly against an invading enemy."

Wiliiams says that "this is the plan emphatically dictated by Lloyd, whom Jomini seems disposed to regard as the father of modern strategy." He quotes also General Rognat, as saying in his Considerations sur l'Art de la Guerre, "Les bons principes de la guerre defensive veulent qu' au lieu de s'opposer de front a une armee envahissante qui cherche a penetrer dans l'interieur d'un pays, on se place sur ses flancs, etc." But Williams goes on to say that Winder had not the means of pursuing the course recommended by Rognat—hanging on the enemy's flanks—and rear—an·l harassing him by multiplied attacks, because "such a plan of war requires experienced troops, or, at the least, men accustomed to the use of arms, to danger, and fatigue;" and he quotes Jomini, "il n'y a que de troupes legeres qui puissent remplir cet objet"—only light troops can accomplish this object.* And Wil-

*The author's translation. And as an American by birth and long inheritance he would be indeed content to know only the language of the United States if he could always use it correctly—and forcibly in advocacy of military preparedness.

liams quotes Jomini further that the light troops must be well trained, and not those that "manquaient entierement d'activite, et n'avaient rein de leger que le nom"—lack training altogether and are light troops only in name.* Williams says that Jomini "probably would not have considered either raw militia or sailors with 18-pounders as fulfilling the necessary conditions." Yet he immediately goes on to say that "the petite guerre, therefore, recommended by General Armstrong and General Wilkinson, appears to be in perfect conformity with theory."

Let us look, therefore, a little into the petite guerre, the flank attacks, the harassing guerilla warfare, recommended by Armstrong and Wilkinson, and rejected by Madison and Monroe.

Then we will briefly consider if the force that could have been put at the disposal of Winder—more, the force that was put at his disposal—was inadequate and unfitted for such warfare.

Armstrong quoted "a high authority" that "multiplying small attacks, made by day and by night, on the camp-guards, detachments, and communications of an enemy, will greatly retard his progress, diminish his strength, and, not improbably exhaust his patience." That General Armstrong and especially General Wilkinson** advocated this strategy was well

---

*The author's translation.

**Wilkinson was always much more successful than Armstrong in making himself heard.

known, especially in Washington, and naturally enough some supposed that this strategy would be employed. Thus Mr. Campbell, in his letter to the committee of congress, wrote:

"It appears to have been expected that, in case our force was not considered sufficient to meet and repulse the enemy on his landing, his advance would be opposed, and his progress, at least, retarded, as far as practicable, by harassing him on his march, erecting defensive works at suitable positions, and throwing such other obstructions in his way as was best calculated to check his movements; for all which operations the nature of the country through which he must pass was said to be favorable. * * * * Falling in conversation with the Secretary of War on this subject, I expressed my apprehensions that suffering the enemy to approach so near as to make the fate of the city depend on a single battle * * * * * was hazarding too much. He appeared to concur in this opinion * * * * he gave me to understand that the movements which had taken place were not in pursuance of any plan or advice given by him." This was the evening of August 23rd.

That "the nature of the country through which" the enemy "must pass was said to be favorable" for the operations advised by Armstrong and Wilkinson was an over-cautious statement—they were favorable. This was considered very important by both Armstrong and Wilkinson. They recommended the guerilla war-

fare, not only because sound strategy indicated it, but because the nature of the country favored it. The country was cut up by numerous deep ravines separated by ridges and hills and covered with timber, in many places exceedingly dense, as so vividly shown by A Subaltern in America. These ravines ran in many directions—often at right angles to the line of march of the British and at times parallel. This, of course, was true of the ridges also. The reader knows that such a terrain is especially well adapted to guerilla warfare. It was doubly suitable to warfare conducted by such troops as Winder had. They were accustomed to the woods, though they may have lived in Baltimore or Washington. They were "woods wise." The British were not. Then the greater part of the troops Winder had were militia and it had been well demonstrated that they would fight well when they had some protection, some cover. It will be recalled that Washington noted this in his letter to Reed. Macomb knew this, and after the first day his absolutely raw militia and volunteers fought well because they had the cover of the woods or of stone walls. They fought well September 12th, because they had not only the cover of the woods, but the planks from the bridges across the Saranac had been made into barricades, and while the militia and volunteers had been harassing Prevost on the flanks, the regulars and others had been completing redoubts and other protective works.* Jackson

*See The Battle of Plattsburg.

knew militia thoroughly and won at New Orleans because he gave his troops cover, protection. The forces under Winder, posted on the ridges and hills to attack the flanks of the British, would have had excellent cover, a protection they were familiar with and would have appreciated; and when it became advisable or necessary for them to retire they could have done so safely along a ravine, under cover of the woods. Wilkinson has told with great detail just where each detachment would have been stationed and by what route it would have retired; he names or locates each hill, ridge, ravine or road, and gives the number of troops, and the name and character of the detachment that should have been placed at each point. We are not interested in these details; and to understand them fully one would need not only maps, but probably also a personal knowledge of the localities. What is important is that although Wilkinson had many enemies and they never wearied of attacking him, they were never able to show that his strategy was not much better than that which was employed—rather, than the hit or miss lack of strategy. And this makes it proper to take three extracts from his Memoirs—enough to give a correct idea of the strategy he advocated. It is proper to say that Wilkinson produced witnesses that could not be impeached to prove that he had advocated this strategy and had formulated plans of defense days and weeks before August 24—very early in July, if not in June. But to quote Wilkinson:

"Here it may be proper to remark, that the maxim, 'he who divides his forces will be beaten in detail,' must be received with qualification, as the art of war depends on an infinity of contingencies, and therefore is not reducible to specific rules: it will apply to armies nearly on an equality, which are maneuvering for advantages; but never to an inferior force, which, though competent to harass its adversary, dare not hazard a general engagement."

"Apathy, indifference, and a blind confidence marked President Madison's conduct, until the enemy was at the threshold; yet from the singular nature of the country, the capital might have been saved by the instrumentality of axes and spades, supported by two hundred mounted riflemen, an hundred dragoons, and four pieces of artillery only; but such was the distraction, the irresolution, and imbecility which ensued the landing of the enemy, and such had been the unpardonable improvidence before, that not a single bridge was broken, not a causeway destroyed, not an inundation attempted, not a tree fallen, not a rood of the road obstructed, not a gun fired at the enemy, in a march of nearly forty miles, from Benedict to Upper Marlborough, by a route on which there are ten or a dozen difficult defiles; which, with a few hours labor, six pieces of light artillery, 300 infantry, 200 riflemen, and 60 dragoons, might have been defended against any force that could have approached them; such is the

narrowness of the road, the profundity of the ravines, and the sharpness of the ridges."

"I did believe, that by covering the roads in front of the enemy with working-parties, to obstruct them by all practicable means, and at the same time by falling on their rear by the new road to Zakiah swamp, or that by St. Paul's church, with Peter's artillery, Stull's, Davidson's, and Dougherty's riflemen and infantry, and fifty dragoons; whilst simultaneous attacks were made on his front and left flank, at every exposed point or difficult defile, by flying parties of four or five hundred infantry, so stationed as to relieve each other as the enemy advanced * * * * * that by such attacks, judiciously conducted and vigorously pushed, if the enemy had not retraced their steps, they would have crossed the Patuxent at Nottingham or Pig Point, and returned to their shipping; or if they had persevered in their march against the capital, their boats might have been destroyed, and their retreat cut off, or rendered a scene of carnage."

It will not be amiss to remark that the British were especially weak in such warfare as Armstrong and Wilkinson advocated. The British fought by rule. They always lacked adaptability. Generally they had an ill-founded contempt for their adversary—a contempt that on rather numerous occasions cost them dearly. On uneven ground—ridges and ravines, cut by streams—and covered with the forest, they employed the same tactics that they used on the open

plain on which they were trained and to which they were accustomed. "These savages may indeed be," said General Braddock to Benjamin Franklin, "a formidable enemy to your raw American militia, but upon the King's regular and disciplined troops, sir, it is impossible they should make any impression." But 400 Indians and French killed or wounded 63 of the 86 officers of the Braddock expedition, and killed 714 men out of 1,100—and would have done even better had it not been for a young American officer, named George Washington, whose training, such as that which many of the militia had received, fitted him for Indian warfare. Indian warfare was essentially guerilla warfare. Guerilla warfare was legitimate and according to the rules, for it did not include cruelty nor did it make women and children its victims, as did Indian warfare. The British would have fared better in the War of the Revolution if they had not stubbornly held fast to certain methods of warfare. Their tactics were inflexible. This was generally true in The Second War of Independence. Wellington's Peninsular veterans fought at Plattsburg and New Orleans in exactly the same way, employing the same tactics and means, that they had used in Spain; and they did the same on their leisurely march to Bladensburg, although they used better tactics in the battle near there. Stubbornly maintaining their close ranks, sticking in column to the road, disdaining to deploy or skirmish, they were pre-eminently the troops that would have

suffered most from the warfare advocated by Armstrong and Wilkinson, and they were just the troops that would have been of the least embarrassment and danger to light troops, mobile, agile, having initiative, at home in the woods, and readily adapting themselves to cover. All the more would they have been helpless against such troops because they did not have any cavalry whatever—not one horse. Yet further, they had practically no artillery of any kind. Both Armstrong and Wilkinson attached much importance to the lack of cavalry and artillery, as it certainly lessened greatly their ability to prevent guerilla warfare or to strike back at light troops infesting flanks and rear.

Apparently Armstrong stuck to his strategy to the last, and it is not evidence to the contrary that on one occasion, when it had become impossible to employ his strategy at that time, he advocated something else. On the morning of August 24th General Winder, from his headquarters "near the Eastern Branch Bridge," sent a note to Secretary Armstrong, in which he said:

"The news up the river is very threatening. Barney's or some other force should occupy the batteries at Greenleaf's Point and the Navy-Yard. I should be glad of the assistance of counsel from yourself and the government."

The committee of congress reported that on the back of this note was the following memorandum in the handwriting of Secretary Armstrong:

"Went to General Winder; found there the President; Mr. Monroe had also been there, but had set out for Bladensburg to arrange the troops and give them an order of battle, as I understood; saw no necessity for ordering Barney to Greenleaf's Point or the Navy Yard. Advised the Commodore to join the army at Bladensburg, and ordered Minor's regiment to that place. Advised General Winder to leave Barney and the Baltimore brigade* upon the enemy's rear and right flank, while he put himself in front with all the rest of his force. Repeated this idea in my letter to him of the 22nd."

Commenting on this, Williams says, "he (Armstrong) still harps upon the enemy's rear, and flanks, and front."

Williams had no friendship for Armstrong. His position as Brigade Major and Inspector of the Columbian Brigade brought him into contact with the Secretary of War and he says, with evident feeling, that General Armstrong was "not a very agreeable person to hold a discussion with, his arsenal of arguments consisting in too great part of oaths, sneers and sardonic smiles." He was, also, "opinionated, rude and disdainful."

Williams was an able and nearly always fair writer on military topics, but his personal feeling must

*This was Stansbury's brigade, which, as we know, was marched back and forth, or kept standing in ranks, night as well as day, with rations of infamous quality or no rations, until worn out; yet was in the front line of the battle at Bladensburg.

have led him to condemn the strategy of Armstrong and Wilkinson, on the ground that Winder's troops were not suitable to the warfare advocated. If their 18-pounders that he mentions were not suited to the work to be done, they could have been ignored—if the Americans had no artillery, they would be on an equality with the British. But the Americans had suitable artillery. For example, they had two companies of light artillery among the District troops—commanded by Major George Peter, whom Williams himself says "had obtained a high reputation as an officer of experience and ability in the regular service," and by Captain Benjamin Burch, a Revolutionary soldier. Williams himself says that each company had six six-pounders. Also, according to Williams, there was another District "company of artillery, with two brass six-pounders and one brass four-pounder, commanded by Captain Marstetler." Among the Maryland troops were "two companies of volunteer artillery, under Captains Myer and Magruder, with six six-pounders." These quotations are from Williams' own enumeration of forces; and this light artillery was available from the 18th and all was capable of effective work. Williams would lead one to believe that Winder had no troops that could shoot. At Bladensburg they demonstrated that they could shoot. A Subaltern in America says the fire from the militia was the hottest he had ever encountered, and he was an old, seasoned soldier. He pays a high compliment indeed

to the marksmanship of the militia. The American militia were good marksmen. Many of them were accustomed to fire-arms. It should be remembered, also, that there were some well trained regular troops. Finally there were, according to Williams himself, "more than 400 cavalry," generally efficient, "a part of it very efficient." Rightly employed, this cavalry would have given the Americans a great advantage, for the British had no cavalry; especially as the Americans could have been well supplied with guides that knew not only every road but every acre of the forest, and the men and the horses of the cavalry did not need to have good roads to move along—they were accustomed to find their way through the woods.

No; it would not have been impossible for General Winder to have employed the strategy advocated by the Secretary of War and Wilkinson, notwithstanding that Williams allows his personal feeling to sway him so far at times that he argues that Winder lacked the essential means. Wilkinson had said, to illustrate how his strategy might have been employed and might have worked out:*

"General Winder should, in my judgment, have ordered his main body, commanded by General Smith, which was under arms near the Wood Yard ready for combat, to have gained the heights on the left of Charle's Creek, and, as soon as the enemy had resumed their march and passed Oden's, he should have fol-

*Memoirs.

lowed them, and fallen on their rear at the time General Smith engaged their front, or when their center had passed the creek; but the enemy gave him a more favorable opportunity by turning to their right soon after they had passed Bishop Claggett's, on a road so flanked by hills and ravines that, by a vigorous attack, their rear might have been broken and cut up before they could have made front to support it. Pent up in such narrow, difficult grounds, and pressed in front and rear, the effect of General Ross' discipline and numbers would have been impaired, and he must have been crippled before he could have extricated himself, while the American corps, with the country open behind them, could have withdrawn at discretion, and, although the enemy might have gained Upper Marlborough, it would have terminated their advance. This is speculation, but, whatever may have been its merits, I know the corps of Scott and Peters panted for action, and they should have been indulged; in such circumstances, blood judiciously expended excites emulation and inspires courage."

His critics could not successfully attack General Wilkinson's strategy. They could only assert that Winder lacked the necessary means. Thus, commenting on the quotation just made from Wilkinson's Memoirs, Williams says:

"In indulging in these speculations, General Wilkinson does not seem to have recollected the anecdote with which, in another part of his book, he satirizes a

speculation of Secretary Armstrong 'in his cabinet at a thousand miles distance.' 'I think,' said the minister to Eugene, 'you might have crossed the river at this point,' tracing the route on a map with his finger. 'Yes, my lord, if your finger had been a bridge.'" Yet even Williams at times admits that Winder's available force might have been effective for the harassing warfare. He quotes Armstrong, without disapproval, for the fact could not be gainsaid, as saying August 23rd, (according to Colonel M'Clane) : .... "multiplied attacks, made simultaneously or in succession, on the front, flank and rear of an enemy's march. Such was the well-known affair of Lexington, in the War of the Revolution, in which 1,800 of the British elite were so beaten, disheartened and exhausted, that, had they not, at sunset, found armed vessels to protect, and an intrenched camp to receive them, not a man would have escaped capture or death."

Williams says that this "plan advised by General Armstrong on the 19th* was similar to the course Gen-

---

*This was reported by Colonel Allen M'Clane, who was a volunteer aid to General Winder and kept a journal during the campaign. On date of August 19th in his journal, M'Clane reported a conversation with General Armstrong, in which Armstrong said:

"Our course is a plain one: assemble as large force as we can; place it speedily at Nottingham or other point on the Patuxent; clear the road between that and Benedict of horses and cattle; break down bridges; abattis the route, when leading through woods; select strong points for defense; and, as soon as his movements begin, harrass his front and flanks by small attacks made by night and by day, while Stuart operates in the same way on his rear."

eral Wilkinson says he would have adopted;" and which course has already been made plain.

As Wilkinson said, with rather rare modesty for him, his plan was "speculation"; but certainly it was more promising, more in accord with the strategy indicated by the conditions and more in accord with the warfare of successful commanders under like conditions, and it was far more nearly common sense, than the strategy, if such it could be called, that was adopted.

But the Fabyan strategy and tactics advocated by Armstrong and Wilkinson is not often popular among the masses, and certainly did not give the promise of glory to an aspirant to the Presidential nomination and of popularity for a national administration, that was offered by one important pitched battle. Further, Madison was, as pointed out in an early chapter, inclined to urbanity and had a nice sense of the proprieties. Wilkinson, at times inclined to satire, may have happily expressed the fact when he wrote:

"President Madison preferred to signalize himself in a pitched battle, and, as he scorned the idea of taking any advantage of his antagonist, he permitted him an undisturbed march to the theatre of combat."

12.

THE BATTLE LINES.

It will not be amiss to review the location and condition of the American forces assembled to defend Washington, on the morning of August 24, 1814.

Bladensburg, already frequently mentioned, a village, in 1814, of about 1,200 people, is about six miles northeast of Washington. "But," wrote A Subaltern in America, "the houses are, for the most part, composed of brick." There was, connecting it and Washington, a good turnpike, "formerly the mail road to Baltimore. North of this road is another old road, which before the City of Washington was founded, was the route from Georgetown to Bladensburg. These roads meet, at an angle of about forty-five degrees, some sixty or eighty yards from the river at Bladensburg. From the junction the turnpike-road continues on to the river, not abutting, however, immediately at the bridge, but curving for a short distance to the south and east along the margin of the stream, and following a sort of causeway, which, at

the time we speak of, was bordered on the west side by thickets of small trees and bushes, and which led to the bridge. The bridge is somewhat less than thirty yards in length, and about four in breadth, and the stream, a few rods above or north of the bridge, is everywhere fordable."*

A Subaltern in America said, as just quoted, that "the houses are, for the most part, composed of brick;" and he continues: "There is a mound on the right of the entrance very well adapted to hold a light field piece or two for the purpose of sweeping the road. Under these circumstances, we naturally concluded that an American force must be here. Though out of the regular line, it was not so far advanced but that it might have been maintained, if not to the last, at all events for many hours, while the means of retreat, so soon as the garrison should be fairly overpowered, were direct and easy. Our surprise, therefore, was not less palpable than our satisfaction, when, on reaching the town, we found that it was empty."

The other British soldiers of this expedition as well express their surprise that Bladensburg, which would have so well lent itself to defense, was not occupied by a considerable body of American troops; especially as the houses would have afforded cover and protection that the American troops so well liked; would have favored the style of fighting

---

*Major John S. Williams.

that the American forces should have adopted; and made conditions that plainly indicated the use of not only light artillery, but of riflemen. But the only riflemen Stansbury had with him had been refused rifles! And, besides, it could hardly have been expected that Stansbury would risk the occupation of a position so far advanced when his force, sadly limited in numbers, was made far less effective because of fatigue and hunger. Further, Stansbury was not an experienced and perhaps not an able commander—certainly he never claimed to be. Armstrong quotes this description of his army from Winder's letter to "the Committee of Inquiry:" "A mass of men suddenly assembled without organization or discipline, or officers of any the least knowledge of service, excepting Major Peter; or if any, unknown to me." And Armstrong proceeds to comment as follows: "Yet to officers thus described—to Stansbury and Smith—he assigns the duty of choosing his position, and to Mr. Monroe, that of forming his order of battle!" It must be remembered that Armstrong had wished Porter, not Winder, in command of the American forces; also, that Armstrong was a man of violent prejudices; but it appears that there were good grounds for his criticism, especially as what he said about Stansbury was never disputed.

At any rate, Stansbury's force, after its countermarch to Bladensburg, recounted in a previous chapter, "occupied the triangular field" formed by the

roads named on the first page of this chapter, near their junction. "In this field, on the Georgetown road, and about a hundred and fifty yards from the junction of the roads, there stood a large barn or tobacco house, and between the barn and the Washington turnpike there was an orchard, which commenced at the barn and extended more than half way across the field, or about a hundred and twenty or thirty yards toward the turnpike. In front of the barn, looking toward the river, the ground has a gentle descent, and upon the brow of the declivity, near the Georgetown road, and some thirty or forty yards in advance of the barn, had been hastily constructed a barbette battery of earthwork, intended for heavy ordnance. This battery was distant about three hundred and fifty yards from the bridge at Bladensburg, nearly west of it, and commanded it by an oblique and not enfilading fire."*

We should remember that Stansbury had positive orders to give battle at Bladensburg; and if a pitched battle for the defense of Washington was to be fought, the route of the British troops made the crossing of the two highways the place for the battle. The battle ground presented natural features that, properly used, recommended it to the American forces. Stansbury's choice of battle ground was not altogether faulty by any means; nor was his disposition of his forces subject to severe criticism, if any. Even Wil-

---

*Major Williams' account.

liams says that his intended order of battle was "not the worst that could have been adopted."

In his account of the battle, General Stansbury said:

"On arriving in the orchard near the mill, I directed the artillery to post themselves behind a small breastwork of dirt that lately had been thrown up by Colonel Wadsworth.* This battery commanded the pass into Bladensburg and the bridge southwesterly of the town. Our artillery consisted of six six-pounders; Major Pinkney's battalion of riflemen on their right, under cover of the town and bushes, also commanding the pass by the bridge; two companies from Lieutenant-Colonel Shutz's regiment, under the command of Captains Ducker and Gorsuch, acting as riflemen, although principally armed with muskets, on the left of the artillery, near, and protected by, the barn, intended to defend the road leading by the mill, on the left of the battery, into the field; Colonel Sterett's regiment was halted in the orchard, on the right and in the rear, and the regiments of Colonels Ragan and Shutz were also halted in the orchard, in the rear and on the left flank, near the creek. My intentions were that they should remain here to refresh themselves as long as possible, and, as soon as the enemy appeared, to form Colonel Sterett's regiment (in whom

*The same Colonel Wadsworth that, as already narrated, arranged and executed the plan that once saved Barney's flotilla. He was a most capable, efficient and active officer, and was almost disgraced because of his good work.

I placed great confidence) on the right, their left resting on and supporting the right of Major Pinkney's riflemen, in view of the bridge, and fronting the road, along which ran a fence, and act as occasion should require. Colonels Ragan and Shutz's men were to be drawn up in echelon, their right resting on the left of Captains Ducker and Gorsuch's rifle companies, in order to prevent the enemy from pressing and turning our left, hoping that General Winder would join me before the battle would commence, and occupy the ground in my rear as a second line."

It must be said, in justice to General Stansbury, that he displayed no small ability in disposing of his force. Major Williams made further comment on his battle formation as follows:

"By this prepared disposition of Sterett's regiment, the troops from the city of Baltimore would have been stationed so as to support and give confidence to each other; and as they were well disciplined and reliable troops, and some of them were necessarily to encounter the first shock of the contest, Stansbury's intended order (of battle) * * * * had the merit of placing all parts of his line within supporting distance of each other."

What was the condition of the forces thus disposed the morning of August 24th? We already know how they were marched and countermarched or kept standing in line, without opportunity to cook their unfit and well nigh poisonous rations, without

even opportunity at times to have water to drink. Stansbury says of their condition this morning of August 24th:

"The men under my command were worn down and nearly exhausted from long and forced marches, want of food, and watching. They had been, with very little intermission, under arms and marching from the time of their departure from Baltimore, with but little sleep, bad provisions, and but little opportunity to cook. They certainly were not in a condition to go into battle; but my orders were positive, and I was determined to obey them."

But General Stansbury's line of battle was not allowed to remain as above described. The change that was made in it was, all competent critics agreed, largely responsible for the conduct of his forces and was certainly a serious error. Whoever was responsible for the change was careful not to take the blame; and who that person might be led to a lively controversy.

This change in his line, and its tactical effect, are well stated by General Stansbury:

"While I was giving some directions to the artillery, I found Lieutenant-Colonels Ragan's and Shutz's regiments had been moved from the place where I had stationed them, and marched out of the orchard up the hill, and formed in order of battle about two hundred and fifty yards above the orchard, and upwards of five hundred yards in the rear of the artillery and riflemen. Thus uncovered by the trees of the or-

chard, their situation and numbers were clearly seen by the enemy from Lowndes' Hill, and the flanks of the artillery and riflemen unprotected, and laid liable to be turned, our main body being placed too far off to render them any aid. On riding up the hill to know who had ordered this movement, I was informed that General Winder was on the ground. I immediately rode to the mill, where I understood General Winder was, and found him reconnoitering the position of the enemy. While in conversation with him, the 5th regiment was taken out of the orchard, marched up the hill, and stationed on the left of Colonel Shutz's regiment, that of Colonel Ragan being on the right, its right resting on the main road; but, as I before observed, the whole at so great a distance from the artillery and riflemen that they (the artillery and riflemen) had to contend with the whole British force, and so much exposed that it has been a cause of astonishment they preserved their ground so long, and ultimately succeeded in retreating. Whose plan this was I know not; it was not mine, nor did it meet with my approbation; but, finding a superior officer on the ground, I concluded he had ordered it, consequently did not interfere."

General Stansbury's conclusion that General Winder had ordered the remarkable break-up of his battle line, was incorrect, and did Winder a great injustice. In his account of the battle Winder states that almost immediately after he reached the field of

battle, and which was about noon, he found General Stansbury "and Colonel Monroe together. The latter gentleman informed me that he had been aiding General Stansbury to post his command, and wished me to proceed to examine it with him, to see how far I approved of it." But this was prevented by the appearance of the British and the beginning of the battle.

Undoubtedly it was Monroe that changed the battle line, and General Armstrong has this to say* of the activities of Colonel Monroe on the field of battle:

"It is only in the following report, that we are made acquainted with this busy and blundering tactician that Stansbury does not know, and whom Pinckney will not name. 'The 5th regiment,' says Sterett, 'was formed under the direction of Colonel Monroe, on the left and in line with General Stansbury's brigade. * * * * I ought also to notice, that the first line formed on the battle ground, was changed under the direction of Colonel Monroe.' In addition to this information, Colonel Sterett adds: 'The action commenced about one o'clock, by an attack on the redoubt, where the riflemen and artillery were placed. These soon retired, and the 5th covered their retreat, and kept up a lively fire, and supported their place in line with firmness, until the enemy had gained both flanks, when the order to retreat was given, by General Winder himself. The opposing front

---

*Notices of the War of 1812, Vol. II, Chap. 5.

of the enemy was never disconcerted by the fire of the artillery or the riflemen, and the brigade of General Stansbury was seen to fly, as soon as the action became serious. No second line or reserve appeared to advance or support us, and we were out-flanked and defeated, in as short a time as such an operation could well be performed.' "

The statements of Colonel Sterett were not accurate or correct, though doubtless made honestly enough. As A Subaltern in America and other British soldiers testified, General Stansbury's brigade fought much better and longer than Colonel Sterett states. It is certain, also, that this brigade would have fought yet longer and better if the battle line had not been changed.

The tactics of the day of battle were almost, or quite, as stupid and bad as the alleged strategy of the days preceding the battle. It is certain that the front line, broken up and misplaced by Monroe, was of such extent, was so formed, and so placed, that the tactics of the British were obvious, and the flanking of the line inevitable. Its forced retirement was also inevitable unless it had reinforcements, but the reinforcements it might have had were so placed—rather misplaced—that they were never brought forward—were really not intended to reinforce the first line. Just what they could reasonably be supposed to do has never been determined. Even the master tactician of

the day, Monroe, never found time to give this information.

But we are anticipating the battle itself. For a moment we will here digress to observe that those responsible for the strategy and tactics of the battle at Bladensburg certainly believed in keeping soldiers on the go. Apparently they thought that the two things a soldier should not be allowed to do were to eat and sleep. The American troops were kept marching most of the day and night; and when not marching they were kept standing in line, without rations, or were reviewed by the President. Apparently their commanders thought that it was a crime to let an American soldier rest. Though worn out, and ready to drop from exhaustion, due to hunger and exposure as well as to much marching and little rest, the troops were marched and again marched as the battle was about to begin. Major Pinkney had this to say of the effect of the change of position of the 5th regiment:

"The 5th regiment, which had been removed from a position where it might have contrived to repulse the enemy, in his attempts to leave the bridge, had now, to the great discouragement of my companies, and of the artillery, been made to retire to a hill, several hundred yards in the rear. The two companies of General Stansbury's brigade, acting as riflemen, had changed their position, so that I no longer perceived them. The residue of the brigade had been removed from the left, and made to take ground (invisible to

us by reason of the intervening orchard) on the right of the 5th regiment, with its own right resting on the main road, and disclosed to the enemy."

In his statement to the committee of congress, Major Pinkney complained rather bitterly of what he termed this "new order of battle." "The 5th regiment," he said, "had been made to retire to a hill several hundred yards in our rear, but visible, nevertheless, to the enemy, where it could do little more than display its gallantry."

In his statement Lieutenant-Colonel Sterett said, "I ought to notice that the first line formed on the battle ground was changed under the direction of Colonel Monroe. On this occasion he observed to me, 'Although you see I am active, will you please bear in mind that this is not my plan?' or words to that effect."

But if not Monroe's plan, whose? It hardly was Madison's or Armstrong's or Winder's or Stansbury's. The only explanation is that Sterett must have misunderstood Monroe. Williams quotes Monroe as saying that the removal of the 5th regiment "at a late period, was a measure taken in reluctance and in haste." And what follows in his statement leaves it to be inferred that this movement was ordered by Stansbury.

Moving the 5th regiment, etc., was such a tactical blunder that after the battle no one wished to own it.

We can not better dismiss this matter than by

making a rather lengthy quotation from Williams' Capture of Washington:

"We have dwelt particularly upon this matter, not only to illustrate the confusion existing at the time of forming the order of battle, owing to the near vicinity of the enemy, and the number of persons exercising independent authority, but in justice to the troops of Stansbury's line, the only troops who can be said to have fled. * * * * It was hardly reasonable to expect that raw militiamen would remain firm in the position in which Stansbury's troops were placed, considering the force which they believed were advancing against them, and the alarm created by the rockets, a species of weapon wholly unknown to them, and apparently of the most formidable description. The orchard would have served as a cover for them, and, if permitted to remain in it, they might have been encouraged by the shelter which it afforded, by the steadiness which the troops in their front displayed under the advance of the enemy, and even by the excitement attending an opportunity of immediate action."

What about the rest of the American forces?

About eleven A. M. General Stansbury was reached by a dragoon from Lieutenant-Colonel Beall, who brought the information that Beall "was on the road from Annapolis to Bladensburg, with about eight hundred men, distant from me about five miles," says Stansbury in his account of the battle, "and

wished to know the distance and situation of the enemy. * * * I advised the colonel * * * to take a position on the high grounds north and northwest of Bladensburg, which would completely protect my left by preventing the enemy from outflanking us that way, and force their main body across the bridge, in the face of my artillery and riflemen, and expose them to the fire of the 5th regiment under Colonel Sterett,* who would be protected by the fence. This advice it appeared Colonel Beall only took in part. * * * * He took his station on the hill, as I was informed * * * * about one and one-half miles in my rear." General Winder says that when the British reached the vicinity of Beall's position, his (Beall's) "detachment gave one or two ineffective fires and fled." Before we dismiss these troops it is only just to observe that as they were not moved forward to support and aid the first line, but were held in their position, the battle did not reach them until the American forces were in such condition and situation that Beall's troops could not have been much blamed for their conduct, even if the preceding correctly reported it.

Also, it is but justice to these soldiers to state further, that "the veteran Colonel Beall, in his brief and modest letter to the committee (of Congress) makes no other excuse for his men than to state that they were fatigued and exhausted from their march

---

*This was before the 5th had been moved by Colonel Monroe.

of sixteen miles that morning before the battle, and that, according to his own impression, they did not give way 'as early as represented by some.'" While it is anticipating the actual battle, it will be said now that Colonel Beall's troops did not flee, and they did not retire until ordered to do so by General Winder. Of this later. Unfortunately they were so misplaced that they could be of little use.

As for the cavalry, they were placed near the first line. Just who assigned them to their place is not clear. Probably it was Colonel Monroe. Stansbury does not mention their place in the line. Colonel Monroe stated that they "were placed to the left, somewhat in the rear of the line." There was no attempt made to use them during the battle, and they were not in condition to be of use. The reader will recall that we left them, the morning of the 24th, men and horses exhausted with hard service and by hunger, just as the bugle called the men from giving their starving horses some hay. It will be recalled that their commander said that they were unable to make a charge—from fatigue and hunger hardly able to sit on their horses, or the horses to move. As a matter of fact, quite a number of the horses were unable to proceed on the hurried march to Bladensburg the morning of the 24th, and several died on the march.

The second line was composed of the troops which General Winder had held at the Battalion Old Fields. We have, in a previous chapter, seen what

was their condition the morning of the 24th. That condition was made all the worse by the hurried march through the broiling sun from the Eastern Branch Bridge to the battle field. This march was begun at 11 A. M. and these troops reached the field at such time that "they had barely time, on arriving on the ground, to make a hasty selection of position." This position was some distance to the rear of the first line. Just what this distance was can not be determined. General Smith, who commanded these troops, said in his report of the battle:

"On Wednesday morning, the 24th of August, at 11 A. M., I received orders from General Winder to detach one piece of artillery and one company of infantry to repair to the Eastern Branch Bridge, and to proceed with the residue of the troops to Bladensburg and take a position to support General Stansbury. This order was put in immediate execution, and the troops for Bladensburg moved off with all the expedition of which they were capable. Having put them in motion, I passed on ahead, in order that I might select my position against their arrival. I found General Stansbury * * * * I left him to hasten the arrival of my troops. They moved rapidly on, notwithstanding the excessive heat of the day, covered with clouds of dust and were promptly disposed of as follows * * * * This position (of the 36th U. S. regiment) was about one hundred and fifty yards in the rear of the front line, but extending to the right."

Other of his troops—Peter's artillery, Davidson's light infantry, Stull's riflemen armed with muskets, and part of a District regiment of infantry—were posted a hundred yards further in the rear. Then, "after a short space of time," objection was raised to these positions—Smith did not say by whom—but he "yielded with reluctance to the abandonment of the position: time did not admit of hesitation." Then, when Major Peter's battery had taken its new position, "it was found that the range of his guns was principally through that part of the field occupied by the 36th regiment." (!) "To remove one or the other became necessary, and the difficulty of the ground for moving artillery, and the exigency of the movement, left no alternative. The 36th fell back about one hundred yards, losing, in some measure, the advantage of its elevated ground. The position of the 1st regiment District militia, from this circumstance, was also necessarily changed. It fell back about one hundred yards. Of the 2nd regiment District militia, two pieces of artillery and one company of riflemen, armed with muskets, were, by directions of General Winder, sent on to the front; with those he flanked the extreme left of the front line; two pieces more of artillery were posted in the road near the bridge at Bladensburg; the residue of that regiment was formed as a reserve a short distance in rear of Major Peter's battery." General Smith goes on to state that the battle began while his "troops were yet taking their different positions."

It will be seen that to the very last possible moment these exhausted troops were marched and marched; kept uncertain and apprehensive; and regiments were broken up.

The accounts of others would place this second line a good deal farther to the rear of the first line. Williams says that "the second line of the American army was nearly a mile in the rear of the first." It is certain that it was not in supporting distance of the first line. General Winder was frank in confessing the faults of the disposition of the troops, and his confession was to the effect that "the main defect in the arrangement of the troops was their being out of supporting distance of each other." General Wilkinson's criticism of the battle simmered down to two definite points—"the bridge at Bladensburg should have been better defended, and the troops were not within supporting distance of each other." Williams says that "the disadvantages of the order of battle and of the distance of the two lines from each other, were made worse by the fact that the troops of the first line were generally ignorant that there was a second line, or any troops in the rear to support them, or on which they could fall back. They were under the impression that they were to fight the battle unassisted, against a force four or five times as numerous as their own." Lieutenant-Colonel Sterett said that he "knew nothing of any second line or reserve being formed to support" him. Major Pinkney stated that he "did not know

that Brigadier-general Smith's brigade was in or near the field until the action had ceased," nor that Barney's artillery was on the field. General Stansbury stated that "before and during the action, he "did not see any of the force" he "was led to expect would support" him.

When one regards the disposition of the American forces one must agree with Wilkinson that it was "void of plan or proportion; and the naked truth is the best apology for it, that is, it was formed on the spur of the occasion, by pieces, and under the direction of many different chiefs, without preconcert, principle or design!" One must grant the justice of the criticism of Williams, who said, "in orders of battle formed with such precipitation as those were, under direction of a variety of inexperienced heads, it would be strange if errors did not exist which the merest tyro might point out."

"Inexperienced heads." "Military inexperience." Therein lay all the trouble; from that came the grievous errors, the defeat, the humiliation!

One unit of the American forces is yet to be placed. While it is mentioned last, it was of the first importance. It was the sailors of Commodore Barney's flotilla, 400 in number, and the marines from Washington, 120 in number, with two eighteen-pounders and three twelve-pounders, and who had joined General Winder at the Wood Yard the morning of the 22nd. Barney had continued with General Winder until

the morning of the 24th, and in his account of the battle be speaks feelingly of the heat, the crippled condition of his men from the severe marches they had experienced the day before, many of them being without shoes, and the hurried manner in which he was compelled to take a position.* This position was "about a mile from the stream at Bladensburg." The two eighteen-pounders were planted in the highway, and the three twelve-pounders immediately on the right of them, a portion of his seamen acting as artillerists, and the rest, with the marines, supporting them as infantry. Immediately on his left was the 1st regiment of General Smith's brigade commanded by Colonel Magruder, and on his right, on an eminence about 250 yards from the highway, was the command of Colonel Beall.

This places the American troops on the field of the battle of Bladensburg, although, of course, it does not mention every small division. But we would miss a most juicy bit of evidence of the inefficiency of the conduct of the War if we failed to have some account of the regiment of Virginia militia under Colonel Minor. General Winder said that on the evening of August 23rd "Colonel Minor had arrived in the city (Washington) with five or six hundred militia from Virginia, but they were without arms, accoutrements,

*He reported: "I preceded the men, and when I arrived at the line which separates the District from Maryland, the battle began. I sent an officer back to hurry up the men, who came on at a trot."

or ammunition. I urged him to hasten his equipment."

Colonel Minor diligently endeavored to do this. It will be recalled that the Secretary of War had deserted his office to seek glory in the field. From Colonel Minor's letter to the committee of congress we make the following extracts:

"We concluded it would be proper," to march "with my whole force to the City (Washington), which consisted of six hundred infantry and about one hundred cavalry * * * * * On receipt of which (General Winder's orders) I took up my line of march immediately, and arrived at the capital between sunset and dark (August 23rd) and immediately made my way to the President and reported my arrival, when he referred me to General Armstrong, to whom I repaired, and informed him as to the strength of the troops, as well as to the want of arms, ammunition, etc., which made it as late as early candle-light, when I was informed by that gentleman the arms, etc., could not be had that night, and directed me to report myself the next morning to Colonel Carberry, who would furnish me with arms, etc., which gentleman, from early next morning, I diligently sought for, until a late hour of the forenoon, without being able to find him, and then went in search of General Winder, whom I found near the Eastern Branch, when he gave an order to the armorer for the munitions wanting. On my arrival at the armory, found that department in the

care of a very young man, who dealt out the stores cautiously, which went greatly to consume time; as, for instance, when flints were once counted by my officers, who showed every disposition to expedite furnishing the men, the young man had to count them over again before they could be obtained; and at which place I met with Colonel Carberry, who introduced himself to me and apologized for not being found when I was in search of him, stating he had left town the evening before, and had gone to his seat in the country. After getting the men equipped, I ordered them on to the capitol, and waited myself to sign the receipts for the munitions furnished; and, on my arrival, was informed * * * * orders had been given to march to Bladensburg, when we took up our march for that place and met the retreating army."

Alas, since then there have been, more than once, a General Armstrong* and a Colonel Carberry and "a very young man," in the wrong place!

---

*Wilkinson wrote in his Memoirs: "When Colonel Minor applied the evening of the 23rd of August, for arms for 600 Virginia volunteers, the Secretary (of War) observed it would be time enough in the morning; but being pressed for the delivery by the Mayor, who introduced the Colonel, he, with a horrible smile, replied: 'Doctor, you are more frightened than hurt.'"

13.

THE BATTLE OF BLADENSBURG.

Ross put his army in motion early the morning of August 24th. This was no hardship to his troops, for they had been eating well, sleeping well, and resting well. About noon the British approached Bladensburg. For half an hour the progress of their column had been made plain to the Americans by a cloud of dust. Hon. William Pinkney, described as an orator and prominent citizen,* was, as we have seen in the preceding chapter, in command of the most advanced American troops, and he says of the opening of the battle:

"The enemy, having reached Bladensburg, descended the hill, about 12 o'clock, in a very fine style, and soon showed his intention to force his way by the bridge. Assisted by some discharges of rockets (which were afterwards industriously continued), he made an effort to throw across the bridge a strong body of infantry, but he was driven back at the very commencement of it, with evident loss, by the artillery in

*But not as a man of military education and experience.

the battery, which principally acted upon the street or road near the bridge, and he literally disappeared behind the houses. * * * * After a long pause * * * a second attempt was made to cross the bridge, with increased numbers and greater celerity of movement. This, too, was encountered by the artillery in the battery, but not with its former success, although it was served with great spirit. In consequence a large column of the enemy, which was every moment reinforced, either by way of the bridge or by the ford immediately above it, was able to form on the Washington side, and to menace the battery and the inadequate force by which it was to be supported."

A Subaltern in America says of the opening of the battle: "The very first shot* cost us three men—one killed, and the other two dreadfully wounded—and the second would have been, in all probability, not less fatal, had we not very wisely avoided it. We inclined at once to the right and left of the road, and, winding round the houses, made our way without any further loss as far as the last range, when we were commanded to lie down and wait for the column. In the meanwhile, the main body, being informed how matters stood (i. e., that Bladensburg was not occupied by the American troops) resumed its march and approached the town. It was saluted, as we had been saluted, by a heavy and well directed cannonade; but, being warned by some of our people where the danger lay,

*From the battery.

it so far avoided it as to close up its ranks, and effect all the arrangements necessary for the assault under cover of the green mound."

The "green mound" was known as Lowndes' Hill —"on the right of Bladensburg in approaching the village by the turnpike from Washington."

General Winder's narrative is taken up from this point. He said:

"Their light troops soon began to press across the creek, which was everywhere fordable, and in most cases lined with bushes or trees, which were sufficient to conceal the movements of light troops who act in the manner of theirs, singly. The advanced riflemen now began to fire, and continued it for half a dozen rounds, when I observed them to run back to the skirts of the orchard on the left, where they became visible, the boughs of the orchard trees concealing their original position, as also that of the artillery, from view. A retreat of twenty or thirty yards from their original position toward the left brought them in view on the edge of the orchard. They halted there, and seemed for a moment returning to their position, but in a few minutes entirely broke and retired to the left of Stansbury's line. I immediately ordered the fifth Baltimore regiment, Lieutenant-Colonel Sterett, being the left of Stansbury's line, to advance and sustain the artillery. They promptly commenced this movement; but the rockets, which had, for the first three or four, passed very high above the heads of the line, now re-

ceived a more horizontal direction, and passed very close above the heads of Shutz's and Ragan's regiments, composing the centre and right of Stansbury's line. A universal flight of these two regiments was the consequence. This leaving the right of the fifth wholly unsupported, I ordered it to halt, rode swiftly across the field toward those who had so shamefully fled, and exerted my voice to the utmost to arrest them. They halted, began to collect, and seemed to be returning to their places. An ill founded reliance that their officers would succeed in rallying them when I had thus succeeded in stopping the greatest part of them induced me immediately to return to the fifth, the situation of which was likely to become very critical, and that position gave me the best command of view. To my astonishment and mortification, however, when I had regained my position, I found the whole of these regiments (except a few of Ragan's, not more than forty, rallied by himself, and as many, perhaps, of Shutz's) were flying in the utmost precipitation and disorder.

"The advanced artillery had immediately followed the riflemen, and retired by the left of the fifth. I directed them to take post on a rising ground which I pointed out in the rear. The fifth, and the artillery on its left, still remained, and I hoped that their fire, notwithstanding the obstruction of the boughs of the orchard, which, being low, concealed the enemy, would have been enabled to scour this approach and prevent

his advance. The enemy's light troops, by single men, showed themselves on the lower edge of the left of the orchard, and received the fire of this artillery and the fifth, which made them draw back. The cover to them was, however, so complete, that they were enabled to advance singly and take positions from which their fire annoyed the fifth considerably, without either that regiment or the artillery being able to return the fire with any probability of effect. In this situation, I had actually given an order to the fifth and the artillery to retire up the hill toward a wood more to the left and a little to the rear, for the purpose of drawing them farther from the orchard and out of the reach of the enemy's fire while he was sheltered by the orchard. An aversion, however, to retire before the necessity became stronger, and the hope that the enemy would issue in a body from the left of the orchard and enable us to act upon him on terms of equality, and the fear that a movement of retreat might, in raw troops, produce some confusion and lose us the chance, induced me to countermand the order, and direct the artillery to fire into a wooden barn on the lower end of the orchard, behind which I supposed the enemy might be sheltered in considerable numbers. The fire of the enemy now began, however, to annoy the fifth still more in wounding several of them, and a strong column of the enemy having passed up the road as high as the right of the fifth, and beginning to deploy in the field to take them in flank, I directed the artillery to retire

to the hill to which I had directed the Baltimore artillery to proceed, and halt, and ordered the fifth regiment also to retire. This corps, which had heretofore acted so firmly, evinced the usual incapacity of raw troops to make orderly movements in the face of the enemy, and their retreat in a very few moments became a flight of absolute and total disorder."

Of this part of the battle General Stansbury said:

"The artillery, under the command of Captains Myer and Magruder, and the riflemen, the whole under the command of Major Pinkney, behaved in the most gallant manner (this gallant officer, in the course of the action, was severely wounded) ; but the superior force of the enemy, and the rapidity with which he moved, compelled them to retire. But one of the pieces was lost, and that was rendered harmless before it was abandoned.

The enemy took every advantage of the cover afforded them by the trees of the orchard, and their light troops from thence kept up a galling fire on our line. On this party, when advanced nearer, the 5th regiment, under Colonel Sterett, opened a steady and well directed fire, which was followed by the fire from the right, and ultimately from our center, when the firing on both sides became general. After a few rounds the troops on the right began to break. I rode along the lines, and gave orders to the officers to cut down those who attempted to fly, and suffer no man to leave the lines. On arriving at the left of the center regiment,

I found Lieutenant-Colonel Shutz's men giving way, and that brave officer, with Major Kemp, aided by my aide-de-camp, Major Woodyear, exerting themselves in rallying and forming them again. Captain Galloway's company, and part of Captain Ransdall's and Shower's companies, were rallied and formed again, and behaved gallantly. The rest of Colonel Shutz's and Ragan's regiments fled in disorder, notwithstanding the extraordinary efforts of their officers to prevent it. On the left, I soon after discovered a part of the 5th regiment giving way, and that excellent officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Sterett, with those under him, most actively engaged forming them again. Soon after, the retreat became general, and all attempts to rally them and make a second stand were fruitless. With a body of United States cavalry, I endeavored to protect the rear and right of the retreating men, so as to prevent their falling into the enemy's possession.

"The men under my command were worn down and nearly exhausted from long and forced marches, want of food, and watching. They had been, with very little intermission, under arms and marching from the time of their departure from Baltimore, with but little sleep, bad provisions, and but little opportunity to cook. They certainly were not in a situation to go into a battle."*

---

*This closing paragraph from General Stansbury's report has already been quoted, but it will certainly bear repetition. We know how true was his report of the condition of his troops.

It will now be proper to stop and consider certain circumstances and conditions revealed by the preceding.

First, the British had the initiative; they out-maneuvered and out-guessed the American commanders, and excelled them very much indeed in strategy.

Ross was a shrewd and able commander. On the night of the 23rd, as we have been informed in a previous chapter, he was encamped about three miles from the Old Fields and some ten or twelve miles from Washington. As already stated, he had his army in motion early on the morning of the 24th—he passed Old Fields at four o'clock. Two miles beyond Old Fields he came to the fork in the road—one fork going to Bladensburg, ten miles to the north, and the other to the Eastern Branch Bridge, west about eight miles. Here he did what he had previously done at the fork of the road from Nottingham to Upper Marlborough—he took the road leading to the Eastern Branch Bridge, and when his last column had got into it, he suddenly reversed his front and marched rapidly to Bladensburg. Thus he kept Winder and the others uncertain as to his route until the last possible moment.

Second, the British used tactics that they almost never employed—they took cover wherever possible and favored flank movements. One of those that had reason to know well the usual tactics of the British noted that they generally made frontal attacks, and, to

use his phrase, "took the bull by the horns." The British did what the Americans should have done—used the brick houses of Bladensburg for cover. They used Lowndes' Hill also for cover and did not disdain to use also the bushes along the creek for the same purpose. And, finally, they so maneuvered and fought that the orchard, which had sheltered the Americans, soon sheltered them. Ross did not hesitate to use tactics that might not have been sanctioned by British tradition, but which observation had shown him were good. It will be observed, further, that he at once saw the opportunity for successful flank attacks made by the withdrawal of Shutz's and Sterett's troops, on orders of Monroe or someone else, from the support of the artillery and Pinkney's riflemen, and so placed that their flanks, also, were exposed.

Third, this breaking up of the front line, as originally arranged, by Monroe or whoever was the "blundering tactician," was fatal, not only because of the opportunity it gave the British to flank not only Pinkney, but Sterett, but for the further reason that taking from one part of Stansbury's force the other part, both parts known to each other, greatly reduced the confidence and morale of both parts. There are many examples of certain forces that have fought well indeed together in several engagements that have not fought well when broken up and thus each unit lacked the support of all the others, and knew it; and in all the history of warfare there is not one example of such

a force fighting as well after being dismembered.

Fourth, the militia fought better than the reports above given would indicate—much better. It must be confessed that the shame, and deserved shame, of the Americans put the officers of the American forces at Bladensburg in such frame of mind that in their reports of the battle they fell quite a little short of doing justice to the "common soldiers." After the burning of the capitol all the officials and officers directly or indirectly interested, from Madison down, joined in an effort to put all the blame on the "common soldiers"—an effort so vigorous, able and persistent that if an equal effort had been made to defend the capital Ross and his forces would have been kept close to Benedict.

If we would find justice done to the troops that fought on the American side at Bladensburg we must go to the accounts of their British antagonists. It is a shameful fact that so many of our own writers have robbed the dead of that good name which is the greatest riches—a ghoulish crime that the fair accounts of British soldiers have made all the more shameful.

Williams observes that the "statement of General Winder shows very clearly the value of the orchard and barn as a military position, the advantage which its possession gave to the enemy, and the difficulty which they probably would have experienced in driving back our troops if they had been suffered to remain near and in it, as General Stansbury intended."

That "blundering tactician" was an excellent aid of the British.

Major Pinkney's command—the artillery and the riflemen—certainly fought well. Stansbury says that they "behaved in the most gallant manner." But they numbered only 600 and the "blundering tactician" had removed their supports and exposed their flanks.

Even Williams says that the statements of Sterett and the others do not do justice to the troops. He says: "Comparing all accounts, American and British, it is evident that even Stansbury's brigade stood its ground long enough to show that, under different auspices, it would have performed its part well. * * * Among the circumstances which induced" Stanbury's troops to retreat were "the galling fire from the orchard; the continued advance of fresh troops of the enemy, amounting, as they had been informed, to eight or ten thousand veterans; no knowledge that any reserve troops were in their rear; and the conviction which every man of commonsense among them must have felt, that, under these circumstances, to continue longer on the field would expose them to the danger of being cut to pieces."

As already stated, the "advanced troops, under Major Pinkney and others, who encountered the first shock of the British army," amounted to only 600 men. "The regiments under Sterett, Shutz and Ragan, too far in the rear to support the advanced troops, mustered about 1800 men," said Williams. These figures

are too high by about 200, unless one includes the dragoons—about 125—under Laval.

No one else made as careful and judicial a study of the battle of Bladensburg as Major Williams; and his official position gave him the very best opportunities to arrive at the exact facts. He did not write his volume on the "Invasion and Capture of Washington" until 1856—he took more than forty years to gather and verify his data and to reach a ripe judgment of the events of the Chesapeake expedition. The following extracts are from his volume just named:

"The British accounts describe but one battle. There were, in fact, two, as distinct as if they had taken place on different days and with different armies. The second line of the American army was nearly a mile in the rear of the first, and there had been no communication between them, no re-enforcement from one to the other * * * * none of the troops of the first line retreated to or rallied upon the second, which was left, therefore, to encounter the full force of an enemy inspirited by its victory over the first line and outnumbering the second nearly two to one. * * * The rest of the army (the second line), amounting to about 2,700 men, was more than a mile from Bladensburg, and did not change its position until ordered to retreat."

The American force present at the battle of Bladensburg, though some of it really did not participate

in the battle, was, as stated in a preceding chapter, as follows:

Stansbury's Maryland militia and volunteers, 2,200; Smith's District brigade of militia and volunteers, 1,070; Beall's militia and volunteers, 750; militia under Warring and Maynard, 390; total militia and infantry, 4,410; regulars—infantry—380; Barney—sailors, 400, marines, 120; and dragoons, 125. Grand total, 5,435.

Ross, in his official dispatch, put Winder's force at "8 to 9000"!

Auchinleck makes much of a statement by a Dr. Smith, who put Winder's forces at the following figures, and given here because they were much exploited:

United States dragoons	140	
Maryland ditto	240	
District of Columbia ditto	50	
Virginia ditto	100	530
Regular infantry	500	
Seamen and marines	600	1,100
Stansbury's brigade of militia	1,353	
Sterett's regiment, ditto	500	
Baltimore artillery, ditto	150	
Pinkney's battalion, ditto	150	2,153

Smith's brigade, ditto	1,070	
Cramer's battalion	240	
Warring's detachment, ditto	150	
Maynard's ditto ditto	150	1,610
Beall's and Hood's regiment of ditto	800	
Volunteer corps	350	1,150
Total		7,503

It will be seen that his addition was faulty. Also, so were his figures. In his official report of the battle, Winder puts his total force at five thousand, which was substantially correct.

As for the British force, it was exaggerated as much by some Americans as the American force was exaggerated by some British. Before the battle the British force under Ross was most frequently reported to the American troops to be 9,000. Some estimated it at 12,000. Auchinleck says that "Mr. Thomson states the British force at six thousand men, just one thousand more than Mr. O'Conner, and two thousand more than Dr. Smith." Dr. Smith's figure would be liberal if only the force present at Bladensburg was meant. Niles Register, Vol. VII, p. 14, gave the following statement of the British force landed at Benedict:

Infantry, 3,183; artillerists, 90; marines and seamen, 1,850; total, 5,123. About 500 of these were left at Marlborough. Gleig, the British soldier and au-

thor, put the number that landed at 4,500. Probably the seamen were not landed—at any rate, they were not considered a part of the land forces. A Subaltern in America says the force under Ross numbered only 4,000. Colonel Beall reached the same figure. Deducting the 500 left at Marlborough leaves only 3,500, and this agrees closely with the estimate of Dr. Catlett—3,540. Dr. Hanson Catlett was an eminent surgeon of the regular army and staff surgeon to General Winder. He was permitted by the British to proceed to Bladensburg the day after the battle to attend to some of the American wounded. He was a man of the highest character. He said to the congressional committee:

"With better means of judging than any other American officer after the battle, my estimate was—at Capital Square 700 men; at Turnpike Hill, 2,000; at Bladensburg, wounded, 300, attendants and guards, 300; in the city, wounded and attendants, sixty; and killed at Bladensburg, 180; total, 3,540. These estimates, though somewhat incorrect in the detail, are corroborated in the aggregate by the best information I could get from the British surgeons, sergeants, and others left in the hospital at Bladensburg."

Commenting on Dr. Catlett's statement, General Armstrong said: "The Doctor's statement is fully sustained by the writer of British Campaigns in America, who states Ross' army to have been composed of four regiments of infantry, one battalion of marines,

and a few rocket men and artillerists—the whole amounting to 4,020 men. Deduct from this number the 500 left at Marlborough to guard the boats and plunder and the result will bring the assailing army to 3,500, as stated by Dr. Catlett."

It is safe to say that if this figure is not correct it is because it is too small. It is certain that Dr. Catlett would not see more than there were and might not see all that there were. It is certain that the British surgeons and officers would not exaggerate the number of the British troops, and might conveniently forget some. However, 3,540 is probably very nearly the exact number of British that fought at Bladensburg—first against Pinkney's 600, then against the 1,600 to 1,700 constituting what was somewhat in the nature of a second line; and then the troops under Smith, the marines under Barney, and the others, that arrived just in time to get on the field—it could hardly be said to take positions. It is not strange that Winder's alleged army, thus taken in detail, was forced to retreat. As for the resistance offered by the Americans in what Williams well calls the second battle, and by 2,210 militia and volunteers, 520 marines and sailors, and 380 regulars—total, 3,110—we will take the account of A Subaltern in America, who will also be permitted to say something of the first battle:

"The American army became visible. The corps which occupied the heights above Bladensburg, was composed chiefly of militia; and as the American mili-

tia are not dressed in uniform, it exhibited to our eyes a very singular and a very awkward appearance * * * seemed country people, who would have been much more appropriately employed in attending to their agricultural occupations, than in standing, with muskets in their hands, on the brow of a bare green hill. I have seldom been more forcibly struck with anything than with the contrast, which a glance to the rear afforded at the moment, with the spectacle which was before me. A column of four thousand British soldiers, moving in sections of six abreast * * * * met my gaze in that quarter. * * * The whole of the light brigade, forming into one extended line, advanced to the attack. In the rear of a high paling the enemy's first line presented itself. I have stood under many heavy fires of musketry in my day; but I really do not recollect to have witnessed any more heavy than that which they instantly opened upon us. Had we been a numerous body, and in compact array, our loss must have been terrible * * * * our order was that of skirmishers. * * * The American line began to waver as soon as we arrived within twenty or thirty paces of their front, and the shouting preliminary to a charge had hardly been uttered, when they broke, and fled. Our men were too much fatigued to follow with any celerity, but we pursued as quickly as we could, and bayonetting some seamen, who pertinaciously clung to their guns, took possession of two, out of the five pieces of cannon, which had so severely galled us.

Our work was, however, but beginning. In five minutes we found ourselves in front of a second line, more numerous and more steady than that which we had defeated. It was composed wholly of regular troops,* who received us, as we came on, with a murderous fire, and instantly advanced to the charge. * * * The battle became now little else than an uninterrupted exchange of tremendous volleys. Neither party gained or lost ground, but, for a full half hour, stood still, loading and firing as quickly as these operations could be performed. Whilst this was proceeding, Colonel Thornton received a ball in the thigh, and fell. The Americans raised a shout at the event, pressed on, and our people, a little disheartened, retired. General Ross himself coming up at this instant, with the better part of the 4th regiment, the fortune of the day was speedily decided. * * * To do them justice, however, their regulars** were not unmindful of the lessons which they had learned upon the parade. They covered their rear with a cloud of riflemen * * * and the riflemen very deliberately, and very judiciously took up positions from time to time. Nor was their fire harmless. * * * I found the brigade gathering together the shattered remains, upon the summit of the high ground, which the enemy's reserve had occupied in the morning. I say shattered remains, for out of the

*A mistake, of course. There were only 380 regulars on the field. This was certainly a real compliment to the militia.

**Nearly all militia.

twelve hundred men who bore the brunt of the battle, nearly one-half had fallen."

Little more need be said of the battle. But especial mention should be made of Commodore Barney and his force of marines and sailors. No better fighting has ever been done than was done by this force. Barney always claimed that none of his force was bayonetted. In his account of the battle he spoke first of "the crippled condition of his men from the severe marches they had experienced the days before, many of them being without shoes, and the hurried manner in which he had been compelled to take a position," and continued:

"A second and a third attempt was made by the enemy to come forward, but all were destroyed. They then crossed over into an open field, and attempted to flank our right; he was * * * * again totally cut up. * * * * The enemy from this period never appeared in force in front of us. * * * * The enemy, who had been kept in check by our fire for nearly half an hour, now began to outflank us on the right. Our guns were turned that way. * * * * In this situation we had the whole army to contend with. Our ammunition was expended." In another statement he said: "So far from using the bayonet, they fled before our men, who pursued them, the sailors crying out to 'board' them. Nor did the enemy rally until they got into a ravine covered with woods, leaving their officers in our pow-

er.* Then our men returned to their station. General Ross, in person, was obliged to take command, but dared not lead them on in front, but pushed out on our flank. Our ammunition being expended, we were necessitated to retire."

The persistent and shameful disposition of many of our own writers to belittle the achievements of the land forces; in fact, to rob them, living and dead, of the honors they had won by gallant conduct in deadly struggle—a disposition given the treatment it merits in The Battle of Plattsburg—was exceedingly apparent in what was written about the battle of Bladensburg. Coupled with that disposition was the other one to glorify the deeds of the navy—a disposition to be commended, for the navy, as well as the army, fought well indeed; and being generally better officered, was oftener victorious, although this difference in favor of the navy was not near so great as our writers, especially those of New England, made it to appear. Because of the disposition just referred to, it yet actually appears in a good many of our histories and encyclopedias that the only good fighting done at Bladensburg was done by the men of the navy under Commodore Barney! And that shameful lie and libel is taught in our schools and is supposed to be truth by many of our people to this day!

---

*Colonel Thornton, dangerously wounded; Lieutenant Stevely, of the "King's Own;" and others. Captain Hamilton and Lieutenant Codd were killed in front of Barney's position.

As a matter of fact, all of the so-called second line; or, as Williams would have it, the second army in the second battle, fought well. Peter's battery fought as well as Barney's; and the infantry, especially Magruder's regiment, fought as well as the batteries. Williams states the facts, and conservatively, when he says:

"The light brigade of the enemy, in advancing through the defile near the bridge over the ravine came within range of Peter's battery, which opened a cross fire upon them with considerable effect. After the first discharge from Barney's battery, the British eighty-fifth regiment was thrown out on its right with a view to carry the left flank of that battery; and having advanced within range of Magruder's regiment met a reception which caused it to retrograde; and crossing the road in open order,* it united with the fourth, which had deployed on the left on the margin of the ravine, coming in conflict there with Kramer's command, which, after a spirited resistance, fell back to the right of the line. The Subaltern in America speaks particularly of the severity of the fire from every part of the American line commanding the defile until the right of the line was flanked. The loss sustained here by the British, as well from the murderous discharge of grape from Barney's battery, as from the

*One must admire the tactics of the British in this battle—open order, flank attacks, taking cover, etc. On the British side it was the best fought battle of the War. Ross was a great general.

cross fire of Peter's battery and the discharge of musketry, exceeded, according to the accounts of the British officers who were present, that of any battle in which they had ever been engaged, considering the numbers of the contending forces."

Yet more than one history of the United States, used in our schools, states that the soldiers in this battle fled without firing a shot! By questioning a rather large number of people, the author has found that ninety per cent of our citizens believe that those brave soldiers were arrant cowards; that instead of standing their ground, though outnumbered, they turned and ran on the approach of the British without firing a shot! This ignorance and misinformation, this injustice to our brave soldiers of a century ago, is our shame and disgrace.

Further, this second line, or, according to Williams, this second army, did not retire until ordered to do so by General Winder. To quote again from the careful, just, accurate Williams, writing dispassionately forty years after the event, and, having been all his life a regular army man, certainly not biased in favor of the militia:

"At this crisis, General Winder * * * *arrived upon the ground, and perceiving his right flank in the act of being turned, and his left nearly in the same predicament, gave orders for the line to retreat. The manner in which the order was executed by General Smith we shall state in his own words:

" 'The order to retreat was executed by regiments and corps as they had been formed, and with as much order as the nature of the case would permit. The first and second regiments halted and formed, after retreating five or six hundred paces, but were again ordered by General Winder to retire.' * * * *

"The retreat of the troops was in consequence of orders from the commanding general, which it was sometimes found necessary to reiterate, from the reluctance of the troops to obey them * * * *

"The repeated orders to retire given to the advanced troops between the Wood Yard and Nottingham were, according to Major Peter's statement and our own personal knowledge, very unwillingly obeyed. At the Old Fields, the 23rd of August, the troops showed no signs of unwillingness for the encounter, great as they supposed the numerical superiority of the enemy to be. At Bladensburg, it was with the utmost reluctance that General Smith's troops obeyed the order to retreat.

"With respect to the regular troops * * * while the troops were in the act of returning the fire, General Winder rode up to them and gave the order to retreat to Washington. On being asked if the troops might not be allowed to return the fire of the enemy, General Winder demanded to know who commanded the regiment. The adjutant pointed to Lieutenant-Colonel Scott, who was then on foot, his horse having

been killed, when General Winder repeated the order, directing him to retire immediately."*

As for the militia under Colonel Beall, whose conduct has already been noted—the troops of the second army on whom was put the most discredit—it is very certain that Commodore Barney—doubtless honestly enough—did them a grave injustice. After the battle it was proved by the bearer of the orders himself and by others, that the troops under Colonel Beall did not retreat until they had the orders of General Winder to retreat, and when the order to retreat was received Colonel Beall and his men protested. Further, Colonel Beall formed his men in regular order before they began the march toward Washington—the retreat.

Commenting on this, and the conduct of the other militia, Williams says:

"The most that can be expected of raw troops, or indeed of any troops, is, that they will obey orders, and not retreat until ordered to do so. If they satisfy these requirements, all the blame attending their movements must fall elsewhere. It is preposterous to expect that any troops, in their anxiety to fight, would mutinously disobey an order to retreat, and yet not a few of the Bladensburg troops were on the point of doing this."

*The orders to retire were more than warranted—the Americans were outnumbered and outflanked. If they had not retired a considerable number would have been captured. General Winder gave the orders to retire, not because he was a coward, but because here, at least, he was a capable commander, as he was at all times a brave man.

When one considers carefully all the conditions and circumstances of the battle of Bladensburg he marvels, not that the Americans fought well—which they did—but that they fought at all. It would not be easy to speak in words of too great praise of the fortitude, patience, bravery and patriotism of the men and officers—except the three superfluous commanding officers.

That they fought well is proved, also, by the losses they inflicted. A Subaltern in America, who certainly would not exaggerate the British losses, wrote, as quoted in this chapter, that of the 1,200 British troops that were in the hottest fighting, nearly one-half fell. In his official dispatch, General Ross put his loss at 56 killed and 185 wounded. It is well known, however, that his loss was fully twice this. Dr. Catlett testified that the British surgeons left with the wounded at Bladensburg, told him that they had buried about one hundred of their men on the field. Nearly as many more were buried by our own people after the retreat of the British. Dr. Catlett estimated the wounded left at Bladensburg at "three or four hundred," and "forty or fifty" taken to Washington. Something of the British loss was given in a previous chapter.

The American loss was reported to be 26 killed and 51 wounded—almost certainly too low, but different figures were never produced.

For the loss and disgrace to the people of the United States because of the events at Bladensburg

and in Washington, a very heavy load of blame must be laid on some one, but certainly not on the soldiers and sailors or their rightful commanders—not the least on them. The full weight of that blame must rest on a national administration so narrowly partisan that it would rather have loss and disaster come to the American people than to avail itself of the services of able men of the opposing political party—so narrowly and pitiably partisan that at times it thought apparently that its first duty was to make places for hungry hordes of party followers—so unwisely partisan and political that in the selection of a commanding general political affiliation and the fortunes of candidates for office were put above the fitness of the general for the place. Even worse and more to be condemned, if that be possible, a national administration so complacently, so smugly wise in its own conceit, so ignorant, that it would not and could not be taught by failure; so incapable that it could not and would not see how inefficient and hurtful it was; so puffed up by its natural characteristics supplemented by the flattery of lackeys and claquers that it had in superabundance the stubborn egotism that regards wise and honest criticism as an impertinence to be coarsely characterized as untruthful; that finds easier than reform the suppression, by lawless procedures, of that same wise and honest criticism; that actually comes to believe that it and the government are one and that wise and honest criticism of ignorance, laziness, untruthfulness

and dishonesty in the administration is "sedition" and "treason!" Such an administration is the most dangerous as it is the most offensive form of that kingly, tyrannical egotism, "The state: it is I."* The national administration in 1814 was guilty, also, of that which some might consider not altogether removed from infamy—by methods with which the American people have been kept only too familiar, high public officials kept the blame for disaster and disgrace from their heads, where it all belonged, and put it on the heads of the "common soldiers"—a feat as cowardly as it was disreputable. For all this such men as Madison and Monroe are to be leniently judged because of not only their great public services, their patriotic work for the new republic, and their many very high and excellent qualities, but even more because of the inevitable partisan prejudices coupled with academic discussions and real doubts about the new form of government, and also the accepted standards of public service of that period—conditions that make the course of the Madison administration much less blameworthy than would be the similar course of a national administration at this time.

*The author, though not altogether ignorant of French, prefers, when in the United States, the language of this country.

14.

THE BURNING OF THE CAPITOL.

A few moments after General Winder gave the order to retreat at the battle of Bladensburg, he directed General Smith to "collect the troops and prepare to make a stand on the heights westward of the turnpike gate. This was done as fast as the troops came up. A front was again presented toward the enemy. * * * While the line was yet forming," said General Smith, "I received orders from General Winder to fall back to the Capital, and there form for battle. * * * * Approaching the capital, I halted the troops, and requested his orders as to the formation of the line. We found no auxiliaries there. He (General Winder) then conferred for a few moments with General Armstrong, who was a short distance from us, and then gave orders that the whole should retreat through Washington and Georgetown."

General Smith speaks of the indignation and anguish of his troops when this order for further retreat was communicated to them. Williams says:

"We can add our own testimony, as an eye witness, to General Smith's statement of the effect which the final order of retreat had upon the troops under his command. Some shed tears, others uttered imprecations, and all evinced the utmost astonishment and indignation; for it was impossible for them to comprehend why troops who were willing to risk an encounter with the enemy should be denied the opportunity."

If there was any cowardice in the American force to defend Washington, it certainly was not in the ranks. Nor was Winder a coward—even those not friendly to him testified to his "personal gallantry, zeal and energy which he displayed on the field of battle."

Why, then, these various retreats? General Armstrong was responsible, by his order, for the last. Was he, or some other official above Winder, really responsible for the others? We have seen that the national administration was indirectly responsible for them by being directly responsible for the shameful condition of military unpreparedness. In addition, there is much evidence that General Armstrong was not the only high official directly responsible for an order to retreat. Certain high officials were not cowards, but they had been panicky for several days. Williams unequivocally accuses "the principal officers of the government" of being "the first to set the example" of the panic "which they almost created, and did nothing to allay."

It seems proper that we here learn something of

the military activities of Monroe and Madison before we go with the British soldiers into the city of Washington. We will begin with a long quotation from Wilkinson. His statements are corroborated by reliable persons:

"About the 12th or 14th of July, Admiral Warren entered the Potowmack with a considerable armament * * * * and this being interpreted into a meditated attack on the metropolis, strong excitements were produced at Washington, at a time when Congress happened to be in session. The idea of a Lieutenant-general had just been started, and the rival candidates for appointment entered into competition for public distinction, in which the advantages were greatly on the side of the war minister, who had the President in subordination, and of consequence possessed the exclusive authority to dispose of the military force, and the implements and engines of war were subject to his discretion also. He accordingly repaired to a narrow pass of the river, about fourteen miles below the city, defended by a wretched work called Fort Washington, and ordered the diminutive force assembled for the defense of the capital to the vicinity of the same place. The Secretary of State, also a soldier of the Revolution, although his office did not give him military command, determined not to be outdone in demonstrations of zeal; he therefore assembled a select suite, and resolved to take the lead of his competitor, by throwing himself immediately on the right flank

of the enemy; and whilst his rival awaited the approach of danger, within the walls of Fort Washington, he determined to seek it on the left bank of the Potowmack; and having drawn around him a party of yeomanry, I have understood, a skirmish ensued, blood was spilt, and a meditated attack of Blackstone's Island, for the purpose of capturing Admiral Warren, was marred by the jealousy or invidious spirit of the war minister, who refused to the Secretary of State a small detachment requested for the purpose."

But at a later date Monroe was more fortunate in getting the desired military force. When, on another occasion, the same war minister took the field, leaving his office in Washington, which was his proper place, Monroe again surpassed him by obtaining "twenty-five or thirty dragoons" and engaging in a much heralded reconnoitering expedition to Benedict, when the British had just landed there. This expedition resulted in only an exaggerated estimate of the numbers of the British, although we have Mr. Monroe's own statement that he arrived at ten A. M. on the 20th of August "in sight of the enemy's squadron lying before Benedict." It appears to have occurred to Mr. Monroe about this time that it would be a tall feather in the British cap to take the Secretary of State prisoner, and he discreetly retired.

However, he informs us that from this hour of 10 A. M. the 20th of August he "continued to be a spectator of their (the British) movements until after the

action at Bladensburg on the 24th." The most important result of this up to the time that he broke up Stansbury's line of battle at Bladensburg is apparently a hurried dispatch to the President. The exact date of this dateless dispatch can not be determined, but General Armstrong said that it was transmitted to him by the President during the night of the 23rd. It read as follows:

"The enemy are advanced six miles on the road to the Wood Yard, and our troops are retiring. Our troops were on the march to meet them, but in too small a body to engage. General Winder proposes to retire until he can collect them in a body. The enemy are in full march for Washington. Have the materials prepared to destroy the bridges. J. MONROE.

"You had better remove the records."

It has been well observed that "the tone of this dispatch was certainly well calculated to create a panic." It had that effect, aided by other circumstances. The panic was, as we have already seen, confined to the high officials, but was none the less effective.

It will be recalled that Colonel Monroe came on horseback to General Stansbury late at night the 23rd and urged him to be vigilant, and then rode away in the darkness; and he was at General Winder's headquarters the morning of the 24th when the intelligence was received that the British were on their way to Bladensburg. Both the President and General Winder expressed a wish that he should join General

Stansbury and he "lost not a moment in complying with their desire." He reached General Stansbury between 11 and 12 o'clock—and the result we know. He was soon followed by General Winder, and he by the Secretary of War, and he by the President and the Attorney-General. The last named stated that before he and the President "could reach the town, the forces of the enemy had possession of it."

Wilkinson says, and in italics, that at the battle of Bladensburg President Madison "run away at the very first shot." Doubtless he would not have risked such an assertion unless there were good grounds for it. And certainly Madison, who, it appears, was on horseback near the advanced line when the battle began, would have been unwise to remain where he might easily have been killed. The only valid criticism is that he should not have put himself where he was in such danger that it was advisable for him to retire, for his doing this—and the evidence is that he did it rather precipitately—may have had a bad effect on the troops. General Wilkinson said that "when General Winder saw the first line so easily routed, without adverting to the primary cause, the example of the President," etc. Wilkinson was unfriendly to the President, was much prejudiced; yet what has just been quoted appears to have been approved by Williams. One thing is certain—the President and the Attorney-General left the field as soon as the battle began, or almost immediately thereafter, and took no

further part in the battle; and that Monroe and Armstrong remained until near the close of the battle, and then retired in advance of the troops. It does not appear that the President gave any commands the 24th. The activities of Monroe have already been set forth, and it will be recalled that Armstrong advised the retirement of the second line, or second army.

The British first entered the City of Washington, the evening of August 24th, with only about 200 men. This party withdrew for the night and encamped about two miles distant; and during the night the central part of the city was held by a lone British sentinel, who had been stationed near the office of the leading newspaper and was forgotten when the others withdrew!

The Americans saved the British the trouble of destroying the Navy Yard at Washington. We will let Ross give his own account of the British work done in the capital:

"I determined to march upon Washington, and reached that city at eight o'clock. Judging it of consequence to complete the destruction of the public buildings with the least possible delay, so that the army might retire without loss of time, the following buildings were set fire to and consumed: the Capitol, including the Senate-House and House of Representatives, the arsenal, the dock-yard (navy-yard), treasury, war office, President's palace, rope-walk, and the great bridge across the Potomac. In the dock-yard, a

frigate nearly ready to be launched, and a sloop of war, were consumed. The two bridges leading to Washington over the Eastern Branch had been destroyed by the enemy, who apprehended an attack from that quarter. The object of the expedition being accomplished, I determined, before any great force of the enemy could be assembled, to withdraw the troops, and accordingly commenced retiring on the night of the 25th."

Ross claims to have burned more than he did. To take from him any of this glory (?) claimed by him is doubly unpleasant, for doing it adds that much more to the disgrace of the national administration. A guard of American troops posted on the Virginia end of "the great bridge across the Potomac" saw some British soldiers at the other end, and the British soldiers saw them; each burned their end of the bridge to protect themselves from the others! The Americans accomplished the most damage, for they not only burned one-half of the bridge, but also a quantity of military stores at their end of the structure. Ross states that he burned the navy-yard: it was burned by our own men, on the order of the Secretary of the Navy, given under the direction of the President! The order was the result of the panic that had possessed the President and his cabinet for some time. Both Commodore Tingly, the commandant of the yard, and Captain Creighton, his principal officer, believed that it was unnecessary to burn the yard and so far disobeyed the

order as not to fire "the new schooner Lynx," and it was saved.

The "rope-walk" which Ross burned was not public property, but the private property of two firms.

If Ross claimed credit (?) for burning what he did not burn, he also neglected to take credit for all that he did burn. He failed to mention the "Congress Library." Williams says that "it was not a very valuable collection; but Ross and Cockburn wanted only the opportunity to render themselves even more infamously renowned than the barbarian calif who burned the Alexandrian library, for he had at least the excuse of not knowing the value of what he destroyed. Their hostility to literature was shown also in another way, by the destruction of the types and furniture of the office of the National Intelligencer."

The committee of congress appointed to investigate the invasion of Washington reported, after very careful investigation, that the value of the public property destroyed was as follows:

"The capitol, from its foundation to its destruction, including original cost, alterations, repairs, etc.	$ 787,163.28
"The President's house, including all costs	334,334.00
"Public offices, treasury, state, war and navy	93,613.82
	$1,215,111.10

"The buildings have been examined by order of a committee of the senate. The walls of the capitol and president's house are good, and require repairs only. The walls of the public offices are not sufficient. It is supposed that the sum of $460,000 will be sufficient to place the buildings in the situation they were in previous to their destruction ....$ 460,000.00

"Loss sustained at the navy yard—

In movable property 417,745.51

In buildings and fixtures 91,425.53

$ 969,171.04

"To this sum must be added the public library, estimated at .... ——————

"An estimate of the expense of rebuilding, in a plain and substantial manner, the navy yard, so as to carry on all the public works with as much advantage and convenience as previous to its destruction ....$ 62,370.00"

As for the loss of the navy-yard, Williams observes that it was one-half of the total loss, and continues:

"The sloop-of-war Argus, if manned by Barney's seamen, might have been saved, or even used as a battery to protect the yard; but the panic which prevailed

appeared to have destroyed all powers of reasoning or forethought."

It is well to remember that the panic was not among the "common soldiers," but among the highest officials.

The British government did what was to be expected of it—when the news of the capture of Washington was received in London "the park and Tower guns were fired three days successively." But, as has been previously pointed out (and especially in The Battle of Plattsburg) there was a difference between the governing class and the British masses at that time. The London Statesman said, "Willingly would we throw a veil of oblivion over our transactions at Washington. The Cossacks spared Paris, but we spared not the capital of America." The Liverpool Mercury said: "We shall add nothing at present to the sentiments which we have frequently and recently expressed on the justice and policy of such warfare. We will content ourselves with asking the most earnest friends of the conflagratory system what purpose will be served by the flames of the Senate House at Washington? If the people of the United States retain any portion of that spirit with which they successfully contended for their independence, the effect of those flames will not easily be extinguished." The British Annual Register for 1814 termed the warfare of Ross and Cockburn as a return to "the times of barbarism" and said, "It can not be concealed that the

extent of devastation practiced by the victors brought a heavy censure upon the British character, not only in America, but on the Continent of Europe."

The British, in addition to their other achievements, captured considerable quantities, for that time, of the munitions of war. This gave them a double satisfaction—the munitions were valuable to and needed by themselves; and the munitions were valuable to and needed by the Americans. The loss of the munitions was a severe blow to the fighting capacity of the United States. Williams and Michell, artillery commanders of the British army, made the following official report of the munitions captured, "between the 19th and 25th of August, 1814:"

"August 19—1 24-pound carronade.

"August 22—1 6-pound field gun, with carriage complete; 156 stand of arms, with cartouches, etc., etc.

"August 24, at Bladensburg—2 18-pounders, 5 12-pounders, 3 6-pounders, with field carriages; a quantity of ammunition for the above; 220 stands of arms.

"Aug. 25, at Washington—Brass: 6 18-pounders, mounted on traversing platforms; 5 12-pounders, 4 4-pounders, 1 5½-inch howitzer, 1 5½-inch mortar. Iron: 26 32-pounders, 36 24-pounders, 34 18-pounders, 27 12-pounders, 2 18-pounders, mounted on traversing platforms; 19 12-pounders, on ship-carriages; 3 13-inch mortars, 2 8-inch howitzers, 1 24-pound gun, 5 32-pound carronades, 5 18-pound carronades, 13 12-pound guns, 2 9-pound guns, 2 6-pound guns.

"Total amount of cannon taken—206; 500 barrels of powder; 100,000 rounds of musket-ball cartridges; 40 barrels of fine grained powder; a large quantity of ammunition of different natures made up.

"The navy-yard and arsenal having been set on fire by the enemy before they retired, an immense quantity of stores of every description was destroyed; of which no account could be taken. Seven or eight very heavy explosions during the night denoted that there had been large magazines of powder.

"N. B. The remains of near 2,000 stands of arms were discovered which had been dstroyed by the enemy."

The public buildings burned were not the greatest material loss of the Americans, and their material losses were not their most serious losses.

The munitions of war lost, not at Bladensburg, but by the invasion of the City of Washington, show what a very serious blow that invasion was to the Americans.

That invasion may have been an afterthought of the Irishman—and a true Irishman—Ross, and the humiliation of the American people may have been foremost in his thought; but it is certain that General Ross showed real military talent and generalship, and kept strictly within the rules of war, when he destroyed or caused the destruction of so many cannon, so much powder, etc., by his "violation of the metropolis."

But while Ross was justified in destroying the munitions of war, the destruction of the capitol of a hostile nation has never been a part of the warfare of what have been known as civilized nations. In his letter of September 6, 1814, to Commodore Cochrane, Secretary Monroe said:

"The late destruction of the houses of government in this city, is another act which comes necessarily into view. In the wars of modern Europe, no examples of the kind, even among nations the most hostile to each other, can be traced. In the course of ten years past, the capitals of the principal powers of the continent of Europe have been conquered, and occupied alternately by the victorious armies of each other, and no instance of such wanton and unjustifiable destruction has been seen. We must go back to distant and barbarous ages to find a parallel for the acts of which I complain."

As was frequently pointed out at the time, the Russians were not considered to be highly civilized. Yet when their victorious army had, with its allies, entered Paris a few years before, no public or private property was wantonly destroyed.

There was never any claim by the British government that the burning of the buildings in Washington was a military necessity, or that they were being used for military purposes. President Madison could not be successfully contradicted when he said, in his public proclamation of September 1, 1814, that the British

"wantonly destroyed the public edifices, having no relation in their structure to the operations of war, nor used at the time for military annoyance." In his notable letter of September 6, 1814, to Admiral Cochrane, Mr. Monroe, yet Secretary of State, speaks of the "system of devastation which has been practiced by the British forces, so manifestly contrary to the usages of civilized warfare." This system had then been practiced for two years. Mr. Monroe continues in the letter named:

"No sooner were the United States compelled to resort to war against Great Britain, than they resolved to wage it in a manner most consonant to the principles of humanity. * * * * They perceived, however, with the deepest regret, that a spirit alike just and humane was neither cherished nor acted on by your government. Such an assertion would not be hazarded, if it were not supported by facts, the proof of which has perhaps already carried the same conviction to other nations that it has to these States. Without dwelling upon the deplorable cruelties committed by the savages in the British ranks, and in British pay, on American prisoners, at the river Raisin, which to this day have never been disavowed, or atoned, I refer, as more immediately connected with the subject of your letter, to the wanton desolation that was committed at Havre-de-Grace, and at Georgetown, early in the spring of 1813. These villages were burnt and ravished by the naval forces of Great Britain, to the

ruin of their unarmed inhabitants, who saw with astonishment that they derived no protection to their property from the laws of war. During the same season, scenes of invasion and pillage, carried on under the same authority, were witnessed all along the waters of the Chesapeake, to an extent inflicting the most serious private distress, and under circumstances that justified the suspicion that revenge and cupidity, rather than the manly motives that should dictate the hostility of a high-minded foe, led to their perpetration."

The national administration was well informed of all the events of this warfare of 1813 and 1814 along the waters of the Chesapeake, and that both violated not only the laws of war, but the sentiments of civilized nations, and gave ample warning of the character of the events that would make up the continuance of that warfare. It had no excuse for its failure to protect the capital.

The action of President Madison when he had recovered from his bewilderment and panic because of the destruction of the capitol, was strikingly characteristic. As soon as he could terminate his wanderings and return to the city, he—did **not** make vigorous efforts to assemble as soon as possible a sufficient force of well equipped and munitioned soldiers to capture the British army, if it again attempted invasion and depredations, but—issued a proclamation! and of

course it employed faultless rhetoric in expressing lofty sentiments. In it he said:

"Whereas, these proceedings and declared purposes, which exhibit a deliberate disregard of the principles of humanity, and the rules of civilized warfare, and which must give to the existing war a character of extended devastation and barbarism, at the very moment of negotiation for peace, invited by the enemy himself, leave no prospect of safety to anything within the reach of his predatory and incendiary operations, but in a manly and universal determination to chastise and expel the invader.

"Now, therefore, I, James Madison, President of the United States, do issue this my proclamation, exhorting all the good people, therefore, to unite their hearts and hands in giving effect to the ample means possessed for that purpose. I enjoin it on all, officers, civil and military, to exert themselves in executing the duties with which they are respectively charged. And, more especially, I require the officers, commanding the respective military districts, to be vigilant and alert in providing for the defense thereof; for the more effectual accomplishment of which they are authorized to call to the defense of exposed and threatened places, proportions of the militia, most convenient thereto, whether they be, or be not, parts of the quotas detached for the service of the United States, under requisitions of the general government.

"On an occasion which appeals so forcibly to the

proud feelings and patriotic devotion of the American people, none will forget what they owe to themselves; what they owe to their country; and the high destinies which await it; what to the glory acquired now, and to be maintained by their sons, with the augmented strength and resources with which time and Heaven have blessed them."

Beautiful! Beautiful! But nothing that would certainly produce a company of good soldiers or equip them with even one cannon. One thinks of Don Quixote. Not even The Invasion of the City of Washington could change the ideas and methods of the national administration.

15.

AFTER THE INVASION.

As quoted in the preceding chapter, Ross was of opinion that he should "complete the destruction of the buildings with the least possible delay, so that the army might retire without loss of time." Williams surmised that it would not have required much to communicate something like panic to Ross. As a matter of fact, Ross undoubtedly was apprehensive—not because of any cowardly feeling on his part, but because it was reasonable for him to expect an attack by the Americans. Undoubtedly there would have been such an attack, and a successful one, if the three superfluous commanders had been as good soldiers as the "common soldiers" and their rightful commanders. At any rate, Ross retreated the night of the 25th in this fashion, as told by one of his officers, A Subaltern in America—a retreat that must be considered good evidence that the British were more beaten than the Americans:

"The destruction of Washington, or rather of the stores or public buildings of Washington, had already

begun. * * * * At the arsenal, public rope-walks, armory, bridge and palace, we accordingly saw nothing except the smoke and flame which marked their destruction. Neither was the opportunity offered of making ourselves very intimately acquainted with the general appearance of the ruin. Having procured a horse, I rode indeed through a few of what were called streets; that is to say, along extensive lanes, paved only in part, and boasting, in numerous instances, of no more than five or six houses on each side of the way, planted at the distance of some eighth part of a mile from one another."

Noon of the day after the battle at Bladensburg and the burning of the public buildings had passed, when, to continue the narrative of this fair-minded and entertaining British historian and soldier, an American army appeared "and pushed forward a patrol of cavalry as far as the suburbs of Georgetown. * * * * But the elements interfered to frustrate the design of the enemy * * * * for just at this moment the heavens became black with clouds and a hurricane, such as I never witnessed before, and shall probably never witness again, began. * * * * Its force was such as to throw down houses, tear up trees, and carry stones, beams of timber, and whole masses of brickwork, like feathers into the air. Both armies were scattered by it, as if a great battle had been fought and won; and as it lasted without any intermission for upwards of three hours, neither party, at its close, was in a fit condition

to offer the slightest annoyance to its adversary. For our part, it was not without some difficulty that we succeeded in bringing our stragglers together, whilst daylight lasted. * * * * In the meanwhile the officers of the different corps had directed in a whisper to make ready for falling back as soon as darkness should set in. From the men, however, the thing was kept profoundly secret. They were given, indeed, to understand that an important maneuvre would be effected before tomorrow morning; but the hints thrown out tended to induce the expectation of a further advance rather than of retreat. A similar rumor was permitted quietly to circulate among the inhabitants, with the view, doubtless, of its making its own way into the American camp; while all persons were required, on pain of death, to keep within doors from sunset to sunrise. This done, as many horses as could be got together were put in requisition for the transport of the artillery. Even the few wounded officers who had accompanied the column were required to resign theirs, and mine, among the number, was taken away. But the precaution was a very just and proper one. Not only were the guns, by this means, rendered more portable, but the danger of a betrayal from a neigh, or the trampling of horses along the paved street, was provided against. * * * *

"It was about eight o'clock at night when a staff officer, arriving upon the ground, gave direction for the corps to form in marching order. Preparatory to

this step, large quantities of fresh fuel were heaped upon the fires, while from every company a few men were selected who should remain beside them till the pickets withdrew, and from time to time to move about, so as that their figures might be seen by the light of the blaze. After this, the troops stole to the rear of the fires by twos and threes; when far enough removed to avoid observation, they took their places, and, in profound silence began their march. The night was very dark. Stars there were, indeed, in the sky, but, for sometime after quitting the light of the bivouac, their influence was wholly unfelt. We moved on, however, in good order. No man spoke above his breath, our very steps were planted lightly, and we cleared the town without exciting observation. * * *

"I stepped to the hospital and paid a hasty visit to the poor fellows who occupied it. It was a mortifying reflection, that, in spite of our success, the total absence of all adequate means of conveyance laid us under the necessity of leaving very many of them behind; nor could the noncommissioned officers and private soldiers conceal their chagrin on the occasion. One of these, a sergeant of my own company, actually shed tears as he wished me farewell. It was in vain that I reminded him that he was not singular; that Colonel Thornton, Colonel Wood, and Major Brown, besides others of less note, were doomed to be his companions in captivity * * * * *yet no apprehensions could be more unfounded than those of that

man; for however unlike civilized nations they may be in other respects, in the humanity of their conduct towards such English soldiers as fell into their hands the Americans can be surpassed by no people whatever. ** * * * To this the wounded whom we were compelled to abandon bore, after their release, ample testimony; and they told a tale which hundreds besides have corroborated."

Dr. Catlett said of the British retreat:

"They appeared to be preparing to move; had about forty miserable-looking horses haltered up, ten or twelve carts and wagons, one ox-cart, one coachee, and several gigs, which the officers were industriously assisting to tackle up, and which were immediately sent on to Bladensburg to move their wounded. A drove of sixty or seventy cattle preceded this cavalcade. On our arrival at Bladensburg, the surgeons were ordered to select all the wounded who could walk (those with broken arms and the like), and send them off immediately. The forty horses were mounted with such as could ride, the carts and wagons loaded, and ninety odd wounded left behind."

The National Intelligencer stated that "the enemy did not bury their dead, except those in the immediate vicinity of the camp. The rest, in number near two hundred, were buried by a committee of our own citizens sent out for the purpose. * * * * The loss of the enemy, before he regained his ships, probably exceeded a thousand men. He lost at least two hundred

killed in the battle and by explosion, and three or four hundred wounded. Many died of fatigue, numbers were taken prisoners by the cavalry hanging on his rear, and not a few deserted."

Interesting testimony was given in a letter in 1855, by Mr. Rush, at that time the only surviving member of President Madison's cabinet. He wrote:

"I have, indeed, to this hour, the vivid impression upon my eyes of columns of flame and smoke ascending through the night of the 24th of August from the Capitol, President's house, and other public edifices, as the whole were on fire, some burning slowly, others with bursts of flame and sparks mounting high up in the dark horizon. This never can be forgotten by me, as I accompanied out of the city on that memorable night in 1814, President Madison, Mr. Jones, then Secretary of the Navy * * * *

"If at intervals the dismal sight was lost to our view, we got it again from some hill-top or eminence, where we paused to look at it. We were on horseback, attended by servants,* proceeding on the Virginia side of the Potomac, which we crossed at the Little Falls, intending to recross at the Great Falls that night or the next morning, so as to be again on the Maryland side, and return to Washington as the movements of

---

*It is a significant fact that in those days the President and other high public officials were careful always to be attended by servants, but never by secret service men or detectives or anyone of that character—"common" labor, but not the assassin, was feared.

the enemy and our own strength might prompt.

"Mr. Monroe, Secretary of State, was active in his steps that night and next day, in rousing, by suitable appeals, the people of the surrounding country * * * * * cut off his retreat. This, it was believed, could be done. * * * * Its execution was prevented by the whole invading force hurrying off on the night of the 25th of August, leaving a good portion of their slain for us to bury, and of their wounded to our care.

"Those duties were performed as humanity dictated, notwithstanding our fresh memory of the wholesale burning of our public edifices of costly and noble structure, containing the national archives, libraries, historical memorials—some not to be replaced—models of ingenuity and art—for even the Patent Office was not spared—and when not a single article of a warlike nature was to be seen or found in any of these edifices.

"Our infant metropolis at that time had the aspect of merely a straggling village but for the size and beauty of its public buildings. Its scattered population numbered scarcely eight thousand; it had no fortresses or sign of any; not a cannon was mounted."

In 1814, Pennsylvania Avenue "was the only regular or used street or road from one part of the city to the other." The other streets were frequently impassable to vehicles or even horsemen, because of the mud in them.

Let it be said to the great credit of Ross that he

never claimed that his retreat was a "strategic retreat" or "retirement to previously prepared positions." He took four days for his retreat to Benedict. He was not molested. The British "army remained the whole day of the 28th at Nottingham, while the crews of their boats were engaged in removing the plunder." On August 30th the army re-embarked.

For rather a long period after August 24th, 1814, gossipy, interesting tales, some weird, the greater number clearly much exaggerated, were told about the hurried flights of President Madison from the battlefield at Bladensburg to Washington and from Washington. Making due allowance for the popular feeling and for the personal prejudice of some narrators, it yet appears certain that the Presidential household and nearly all of the most prominent public officials certainly believed firmly in "Safety First" and, if they acted vigorously on nothing else, they acted with extreme vigor and promptness on that belief. But this was clearly an instance of discretion being the better part of valor and certainly the President would have been only foolish to take any chances of being captured.

Among the very most discreditable and contemptible features of "The Invasion of the City of Washington" was the concerted, adroit and able, and all too successful, effort of the public characters concerned to put all the blame on the "common soldiers." If the executive and the legislative branches of the national

government had shown one-fourth as much earnestness, ability and energy in repelling the British as they showed in shifting the blame for the burning of the capitol, there would not have been that blame to be avoided by public officials, who should have borne it, and to be put on the "common soldiers," who merited none of it.

In his narrative, A Subaltern in America says:

"On the morning of the 7th (of October) the anchors were raised and we stood in magnificent array towards the Chesapeake. * * * * A beautiful schooner, carrying a white flag at her main-topmast head, shot after us from the Patuxent; she overtook us just as we were preparing to bring up for the night, and great was the joy of every man on board when it appeared that she was the bearer of the majority of the men and officers who had been left behind wounded at Bladensburg. Among the individuals thus restored to the army were Colonels Thornton and Wood. (Major Brown's hurts were too serious to admit of his removal.)"

Those that have read The Battle of Plattsburg will recall the care that Macomb and MacDonough gave the British wounded that fell into their hands and the honors they paid to the British dead.

The feelings and sentiments of our brave soldiers and sailors in 1812-14 toward their British foes of those years of war would certainly shame us beyond words if any citizen of the United States should, more

than a hundred years later, remember any occurrence of our Second War of Independence with any ill will or ill feeling towards the British of a hundred years ago; and certainly we would be shamed yet more if because of any event of that War, we had any ill will or any ill feeling toward any of the British people of today.

To give a complete, just and accurate account of "The Invasion of the City of Washington" and to convey a just and accurate understanding of the events of that invasion, it has been necessary to recite some unpleasant facts; it has been necessary to reveal the ignoble, discreditable and regrettable. The facts must be known and considered. But it would be equally ignoble and discreditable to remember those facts now to harbor any ill will. The British people of today are to be judged by what they themselves do. They are now, not our enemies, but our allies. They are fighting, and valiantly, now, not against our old friend, but with her. A thousand events are now a thousand compelling reasons for the bonds of friendship and respect between the American people and the British people being a thousand times stronger than any feelings that have ever separated them. If we read aright the history of the War of 1812 we will admire none the less the people of our Mother Country that speak the language every person in the United States should speak, while our admiration for our soldiers and sailors in that War will be deepened into reverence and

our love of our country will be sanctified into a deeper devotion—a devotion that our soldiers and sailors of today will show forth in deeds worthy of those that before them have fought to make our country The Land of the Free and The Home of the Brave.

The one concern of the author has been always to state the truth, all the truth, and nothing but the truth, fearlessly, without prejudice, shielding no one, but, above all, doing injustice to no one. He hopes that his readers will remember, as he has remembered, that certain things were done when passions had been aroused by war and when ideas and standards were different from what they are today.

Let it be said, also, in justice to Madison and Monroe that they were always honest with the American people. Always they desired the prosperity and perpetuity of the new Republic.

Nor were they deaf to criticism, though nearly always they ignored it. They—and especially Madison—were always fair and gentlemanly, and, if it must be said that too often they paid no attention to their honest and intelligent critics, also they did not reply by saying the critic was untruthful—when future revelations would have shown that it was not he that had—doubtless honestly enough—misstated the facts. The little respect shown at that time for the national government, especially by state officials, should always be remembered for that made the war task of the national administration at least twice as difficult as it

would have been had the national government been regarded as it is today.

Let it be said in justice to Armstrong that he, too, never deceived the American people by stating that our forces had cannon when they had not, or by exaggerating the forces actually in service. Let it be said also that the executive branch of the government was above, in ability and purpose, the subservient, mediocre congress—their representatives that the people had elected. After all, the greater part of the blame for the misfortunes and humiliations of the War of 1812 must rest on a congress too weak, too lazy, too cowardly to assert its share in the conduct of public affairs.

One very beautiful, very creditable element of the War of 1812 was our friendship for the French. It was freely asserted and as freely acknowledged that one reason for that War was that Great Britain was at war with France and by fighting Great Britain we would indirectly aid France. Monroe was accused, because he favored the War, of being "the tool of France," of being "subservient to France." That he was the active, loyal friend of France was true; he never denied it; and he was doubtless proud of it, as he should have been. It was clear that if France had not aided us we would have been beaten in our first War of Independence. If it had not been for France we would have been the colonies of the Kingdom of Great Britain and not an independent people having a republican

form of government. It was not to our credit that at an earlier date we had not shown in the most substantial way our appreciation of the friendship and aid of France. It is none to our credit now that we did not earlier begin our preparations to fight with France in this present war. If there is one people on the globe that we should admire and love, if there is one nation that we should stand beside as we would stand beside our best friend, with all our strength and to the utmost, it is France. Our hearts should be full of proud emotion that now the people of this Republic that France made possible, are not so cowardly as to refuse to show their friendship, gratitude and love for their ally of old. God grant that on the fields of France the two tri-color flags may go together to glorious victory for Opportunity and Freedom.

(The End.)

FRANCE.

To France one must ever say, "All glory to you!" Whatever may happen, whatever the result of this war may be—and I have no doubt as to what the result will be—France and Belgium will be enshrined in the hearts of all liberty loving people. France's deeds will be sung, and laurel wreaths will ever be placed upon the brows of that great republic.—Lord Reading, April 11, 1918.

A LITTLE GIRL'S VISION.

(Odette Gastinel, a 13 year old child in France, a pupil in the Lysee Victor Duray, was asked by her teacher to write a theme on the subject of the coming of the Americans to assist in driving out the German invaders. Here is a translation of what she wrote.)

It was only a little river, almost a brook; it was called the Yser. One could talk from one side to the other without raising one's voice, and the birds could fly over it with one sweep of their wings. And on the two banks there were millions of men, the one turned toward the other, eye to eye. But the distance which separated them was greater than the stars in the sky; it was the distance which separated right from injustice.

The ocean is so great that the seagulls do not dare to cross it. During seven days and seven nights the great steamships of America, going at full speed, drive through the deep waters, before the lighthouses of France come into view; but from one side to another the hearts are touching.

ODETTE GASTINEL.

FRANCE.

Finish'd the days, the clouds dispell'd,

The travail o'er, the long-sought extrication,

When lo! reborn, high o'er the European world,

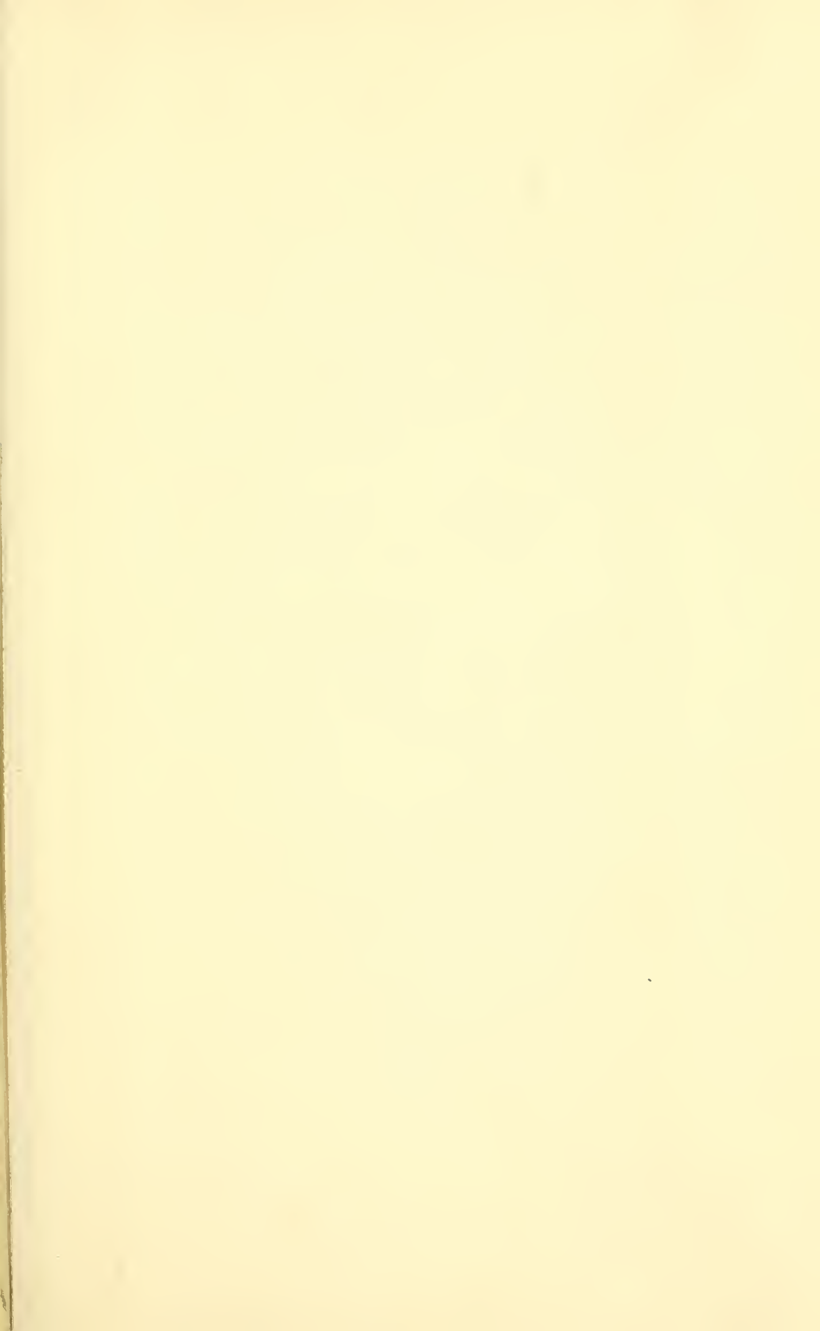
(In gladness, answering thence, as face afar to
  face, reflecting ours, Columbia,)

Again thy star, O France—fair, lustrous star,

In heavenly peace, clearer, more bright than
  ever,

Shall beam immortal. —Walt Whitman.

1979



DEC 75

0 003 261 068 7
LIBRARY OF CONGRESS